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Table of international exchange rates for various countries including Albania, Andorra, Argentina, etc.

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The battle for The Royal Academy

Coming soon to the Summer Exhibition?

G2 with European weather

Education

Alternative schools towards the third dimension

Pages 10/11

Why the Americans are taking over our funeral industry

Have a nice death

G2 pages 4/5

More accountability offered in last-minute concessions to Scott rebels Major fights to halt revolt

Michael White and Richard Norton-Taylor

THE Government last night made a series of concessions, promising more ministerial accountability, in an attempt to head off a rebellion by some of its own backbench MPs angry about the shortcoming exposed by the Scott report into arms sales to Iraq.

And in the hours leading up to the late night vote, ministers engaged in anxious talks with the nine-strong block of Ulster Unionist MPs in an effort to enlist their support. Some sources were suggesting a secret deal involving arrangements for a Northern Ireland forum was in the offing.

In the Commons, Tory MPs who had cheered a repeat performance of Trade Secretary Ian Lang's initial defence of the Government from Sir Richard Scott's criticisms were forced to endure a fierce, forensic performance from Mr Cook whose mastery of the small print of the Scott Report rebuffed all attempts to check his flow.

While Mr Lang again insisted that the report vindicated claims that the ministers in the firing line — William Waldegrave, Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Attorney General, Sir Nicholas Lyell — had acted honourably in Britain's interests, Mr Cook said Sir Richard had found them guilty on all four of the central charges levelled by Labour during the three-year controversy.

In a dramatic appeal to the Tory benches, Mr Cook called for their support. "The first duty of MPs is to defend the rights of Parliament against any government that threatens those rights," he said. "That is why Parliament cannot allow the present government to ignore the findings of the Scott Report that MPs were dismissed consistently failed in their duty of accountability."

In a parallel debate in the Lords, Lady Thatcher — prime minister during the crucial years when the guidelines on arms sales were changed — launched a ferocious defence of the policy. All day Unionist MPs had been giving hints in both directions, knowing that defeat for Mr Major would be followed immediately by a vote of confidence this week and unless they came to his rescue — a March general election with incalculable consequences for the Ulster peace process.

As expected, Mr Lang sounded marginally more contrite than in his first statement 10 days ago and con-

firmed limited concessions, signalled earlier, on Government procedures. But he shied away from making any commitment to Sir Richard's key recommendations, including those on more open government and arms sales policy. He claimed the Government had an unrivalled record on openness.

Mr Lang told MPs that the principle of ministerial accountability to Parliament — another central theme of the Scott report — should be addressed by the Commons' new public service committee. Sir Richard accused ministers of repeatedly failing to meet the obligations of their own code of conduct which says ministers should not mislead Parliament.

On another key issue — the use of Public Interest Immunity (PII) certificates, so-called gagging orders — Mr Lang said only that the Government would seek the views of MPs. In a separate move, Sir Nicholas Lyell said he would "like to hear from lawyers and others".

Mr Lang acknowledged that the statute — based on second world war emergency powers — giving ministers the power to impose export controls without reference to Parliament "should be reviewed". Sir Richard described the statute as "a reprehensible abuse of executive power by successive administrations".

Three backbenchers attacked the Government's policy on sales of arms to Iraq. Sir Richard Shepherd, the MP for Aldridge-Brownhills, warned: "I am profoundly disturbed that the intent behind the policy, if not to tell a dis-truth, was to actually give an impression that was designedly misleading."

What stood between Britain and an elective dictatorship "is the candour, the openness, the frankness of those that govern us, and when they mislead, how do we know the premises on which we argue our case are truthful?"

Leader comment, page 8; Hugo Young, page 9. Full background and latest news on the Scott Report on arms sales on the Internet site on <http://go2.guardian.co.uk/scott>



Protesters masquerading as John Major and Saddam Hussein in a CND demonstration outside the House of Commons during the Scott debate yesterday

Labour's little devil turns Tory narcolepsy to nightmare

Sketch Simon Hoggart

"I should be dreary to go on praising Robin Cook's speeches, but it isn't, because he is so extraordinarily good. He is so much better than anybody on his own side. It's as if Eric Cantona were to play park football, or Dame Judi Dench turn up with the Wittering Parva Players. Ian Lang began with the usual exceptional tedium. This may have been deliberate. Tory rebels, under a powerful narcoleptic spell, could hardly be gaily steered into the Aye lobby by specially trained para-whips. Mr Lang's defence was that the Government had been entirely exonerated by the Scott Report. However, it was just possible, he conceded, that there might be room for a few changes, a little tinkering.

some slight modifications to the gleaming machinery of government. The XJ6 had been sent for a service, he implied, and it was time to remedy that squeaky ashtay. For the most part, Tory backbenchers sat in a strange, dormant silence. They were like those middle-aged businessmen in the weird British Airways ads, snoozing away in their nappies. Mr Lang finished, once again, by blaming it all on Mr Cook. "Vindictive... contemptible... odious" were just a few of the adjectives he used, but even they scarcely roused MPs from their torpor. The Miniature Satan rose but, being short, not very far. He has been compared (by me) to a vandalised garden gnome, but that implies a passivity which he never displays. Rather, he is the monster in the old Quatermass films, drawing extra strength and ferocity from the increasingly desperate attempts to stop him. Fill him full of bullets,

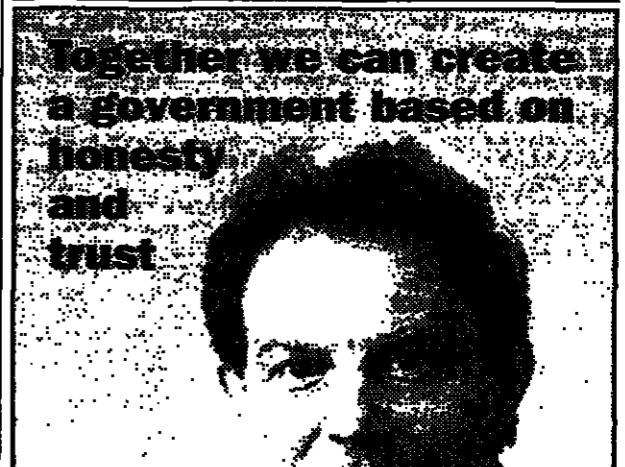


and you get another tentacle round your neck. Every interruption, every intervention, seems to heighten his savagery. Tories stood up, but he knocked them down with the ease of a small boy kicking dandelion heads. David Mellor made the mistake of standing up twice. ("Is

he still 'ere?" asked Dennis Skinner.) If I were a cynic I might imagine that Mr Mellor was trying to grease his way back on to the front bench. All he did yesterday was make matters worse by repeating the Tory charges against Mr Cook, permitting him, with extempore brio, to build up his speech. For example, Conservatives allege Labour alleged the Government let arms go to Saddam. Mr Cook skated over this. "The Government had permitted the export of machine tools which would permit the Iraqis to make shells and missiles. Tories jeered. Mr Cook's voice rose to its familiar squeak (at times only hats and Elaine Kallit-Bowman can hear him). "Saddam Hussein was never going to take British machine tools and shove them down gun barrels to point at British soldiers!" Phil Galle (C. Ayr), the thinking man's Rab C. Nesbitt, said there was a difference. Mr Cook cheerfully batted

him down with a five-dollar word from the Scott Report: "Sophistry". Michael Heseltine, the only minister praised by Scott, interrupted twice. (Later Menzies Campbell described his poignant situation: "Sir Richard Scott gave him a medal,

but he cannot wear it.") Hezza tried hard ("the hollow and synthetic allegations he has peddled across the country have exploded in his face", a metaphor not so much mixed as Cuisinarted) but was out of his depth. Mr Cook finished in triumph.



Labour Party recruitment form with fields for name, address, and contact details. Includes a 'Join Labour today' headline and a phone number 0990 300 900.

Strictures at an exhibition

Michael Ellison Arts Correspondent ONE of the great institutions of the British art world is at the centre of a struggle between the guardians of tradition and the champions of pickled sheep and sleeping actresses in glass cases. One faction at the 238-year-old Royal Academy of Arts wants to transform the staid usage of its summer show, open to any artist with the £12.50 entry fee. Each year 15 members of the academy see up to 13,000 works and select about 1,200 to be crammed into the galleries at Burlington House. Piccadilly. Then the critics gather to deride the exhibition as an amateurish affront. But this year Kate Bland,

the academy's artist co-ordinator, wrote to dealers: "The academy is concerned that the artistic standard of the exhibition needs to be greatly improved." She said now the aim was to encourage younger artists to submit work. "We don't do installations and that's what a lot of young artists are doing. We want to make the exhibition seem more appealing." The forum to discuss the role of the exhibition was to have included a panel chaired by Julia Peyton-Jones, director of the Serpentine Gallery. The Serpentine was where the actress Tilda Swinton was installed in a glass case last year. It has been described by the critic Brian Sewell as specialising in silly shows staged by silly women. But a meeting to consider the changes has been postponed after a backlash by Royal Academicians. David Lee, editor of Art Review, said: "A very loyal public goes to the show and they spend a lot of money. The economics of the Royal Academy are so uncertain, because they receive no public subsidy, that they need the income. I was baffled when I heard about this. The show is crap and critics love it to be crap." Last night Karsten Schubert, who represents Rachel Whiteread, winner of the Turner Prize with a cast of the inside of an east London house, offered surprising support for the traditionalists. "You don't f--- with Ascot, so you shouldn't f--- with the Royal Academy summer show," he said.

Hangling jury, G2 Front

This is Dr Theodore 'Ted' Hall, a retired Cambridge scientist. Is he the missing link in one of the world's biggest espionage coups? Page 3

Salford shows Eastern promise as Saudi revives old textile mill

Martyn Hallsall, Northern Industrial Correspondent A SAUDI businessman is preparing to re-invent the Industrial Revolution as a mill-owner in Salford. But the mill, complete with old-fashioned looms imported from Korea, will make Arab headgear for export to Saudi Arabia. Sutton Vale, a Saudi-owned company, is investing more than £1 million to revive a former textile mill. Salford councillors, who have made their largest industrial grant of £130,000 to sweeten the Saudis' arrival, hope the city will attract more Middle Eastern businesses. Mike Anny, who advised Sutton Vale, said only historic looms, using tradi-

tional shuttles, could produce the red, white and black yashmaks — traditional headgear — in a delicate process resembling embroidery. Textile experts had to travel to South Korea to buy the kind of looms phased out in Britain in the 1960s, but which Saudis prefer for handling the fine cotton used for yashmaks. Sutton Vale, which hopes to employ 100 workers, also imported South Korean experts to train its British employees, but is appealing for skilled former mill workers to come out of retirement. Hussein Charcharchi, the company's UK director, said: "In Saudi the 'Made in Britain' tag is a big selling point." Even if the looms were made in Japan.

Inside News 2 Letters 6 Comment 9 Obituaries 10 Financial news 12

G2

Inside Story 4/5 Law 7 Health 8/9 Education 10/11 Women 12/13

Quick Crossword 15 Cartoons 15 Radio 16 Television 16 Weather 16

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Fayeds lose battle for citizenship

Alan Travis
Home Affairs Editor

HARRODS' owner, Mohamed Al Fayed and his brother, Ali, yesterday lost their High Court fight with the Home Secretary to become British citizens.

Mr Justice Judge ruled that while Michael Howard's rejection of their applications was lawful, it "may have lacked the appearance of fairness". He asked sympathetically whether it was right not to give reasons in such cases.

He even urged Mr Howard to use his discretion and give the two Egyptian-born brothers some indication why their applications had failed.

The Fayeds are to appeal "urgently" to the House of Lords. After the ruling was delivered, Mohamed Al Fayed

declared: "We fight on. This was a moral victory for us. I will not rest until I have exposed the truth, as I have done in the past with other government matters of great importance."

"I am determined to know the reasons behind the refusal of our applications and the part played by [Mr] Howard and the junior minister who initially handled the applications, Charles Wardle."

"I believe that both men had conflicts of interest which should have disqualified them from any involvement in the decision."

Mohamed Al Fayed played a key part in the exposure of the MPs' "cash for questions" affair, and Mr Howard and Mr Wardle were involved in the Department of Trade and Industry inquiry into the brothers' takeover of House of Fraser, which owned Harrods.

Mr Fayed said it was well documented that Mr Howard had taken the unusual step of intervening personally in the

affair and "there were conversations between him and Mr Wardle which have yet to be explained".

The brothers have lived in Britain for more than 30 years and Mohamed, as the Harrods chairman, took the unusual step of disclosing he had paid £3 million in UK income tax last year and £22 million in corporation tax.

Their principal homes are in Britain and between them they have seven British born children. Harrods employs more than 5,000 people.

"They have played a very full part in the charitable life of the country. They feel they have done enough to be permitted citizenship," said Harrods' public affairs director, Michael Cole.

During the two-day hearing last week, the High Court heard that the absence of an official reason for the rejected citizenship applications had led to widespread speculation that the decision had been made on purely political grounds.

The decision not to disclose the reasons for the rejection was taken under the 1981 Nationality Act. The Fayeds complained during the hearing that Mr Howard's actions represented "the epitome of closed government".

Mr Justice Judge yesterday appeared sympathetic to their case, noting that the Home Office letters rejecting their applications last February had been "terse in the extreme".

But "however desirable that may seem to the applicant — and indeed the court — the Secretary of State cannot be required to give reasons," the judge said.

"On the uncontested facts of this case, divorced from the statutory context, the process lacks the appearance of fairness, but that does not render the decision unlawful."

He said that whether it was right for candidates for citizenship to have their applications refused without knowing the reasons was a matter for Parliament.

'I am determined to know why we were refused and the part played by Michael Howard'

declared: "We fight on. This was a moral victory for us. I will not rest until I have exposed the truth, as I have done in the past with other government matters of great importance."

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Opportunity lost in a jolly vista

First night
Judith Mackrell

Far from the Madding Crowd Birmingham Hippodrome

IT'S THE big dilemma for all contemporary ballet choreographers. While audiences maintain a stubborn preference for big three act story ballets, companies can't dance Sleeping Beauty every night. So new story ballets have to be made. Yet finding workable plots is not that simple — for, as even MacMillan and Ashton have shown, more stories prove to be undanceable than otherwise.

If you're Twyla Tharp you invent your own tale (as in Mr Worldly Wise) and construct the sketchy narrative under a blast of dancing. If you're David Bintley, however, you scour the bookshelves.

Recently he has grappled with Cyrano and Edward II. His latest choice, for the Birmingham Royal Ballet, is Far from the Madding Crowd. This sounds like a good idea as Hardy supplies his heroine Bathsheba with three lovers, giving Bintley ample opportunities to do what ballet finds easiest — showing people falling in and out of love. But there are other things in Hardy, such as complex motivation, heavy duty philosophy and pages of description that are far less sympathetic to dance.

The ballet scores instant points with its music and design. Hayden Griffin's simple, atmospheric interiors give out on to vast distances of countryside that keep the narrative in touch with the elements, while Paul Reade's sympathetic score cues the plot with

pastoral melodies, folk dances and churning climaxes.

Yet Griffin, Reade, and Bintley fatally inclined to sanitise their material. While Hardy's novel is smudged with dirt, muddle and despair, the ballet mostly presents a jolly vista of waving milkmaids, smocked shepherds and comely rustics. Too much of the choreography is side-tracked by heritage diversifications, and the more attention Bintley lavishes on peasant dances and sheep-shearing contests, the more he lets slip the story's essentials, the *lova pas de deux*.

The dance rarely gets under the skin of Bathsheba's three relationships, and we seldom feel the movement throbbing with the Hardy themes of hunger and obsession. At the points where Bintley should trust the dancing rather than the tale, he draws back.

Yet the movement is rescued by some fine moments. Bintley's mime throughout is alive and eloquent and the choreography for the seduced and abandoned Fanny is a lovely portrait of shy, delicate hesitations. The ballet also rises to shocking melodrama in the struggle over Fanny's dead body where Twyla bravely allows away Bathsheba's consoling arms and covers the corpse with kisses.

Most importantly, Bintley gets excellent performances from his dancers. Though Kevin O'Hara's Troy overplays childishness at the expense of sexiness, Monica Zamora convincingly shows the armour of Bathsheba's beauty being pierced by tragedy, Yuri Zulkhov is a compellingly tense William Boldwood, and David Justin plays Gabriel Oak perfectly, his awkward honest gait showing up the romantic's soul trapped inside the *dour workman's* body.

Brain damaged boy at centre of euthanasia battle dies aged two

Kevin Toole

THOMAS Creedon, the two-year-old brain damaged child at the centre of a legal battle over euthanasia, has died following a chest infection.

Thomas and Fiona Creedon, Thomas's parents, had launched a High Court action to remove the artificial feed-

ing tube that they believed prolonged their son's suffering. The Creedons, from Keyingham, near Hull, were opposed by his doctors.

Thomas died at home last Friday, Mr Creedon said yesterday. "It's sad for Thomas and his hard for us. But it was hard for Thomas when he was alive and it is a relief he is no longer in pain. He was our son and we loved him."

Singer faces £200,000 legal bill after agreement hammered out with record label



Robbie Williams, who apologised for bringing the action after yesterday's High Court hearing. PHOTOGRAPH: STEFAN ROUSSEAU

Ex-Take That star drops freedom fight

Angella Johnson

FORMER Take That singer Robbie Williams was left with an estimated £200,000 legal bill and a question mark over his future yesterday, when a High Court attempt to break free from his record company collapsed after just two minutes.

Williams, who left the now-forgotten teen band last July, was due to argue his right to leave RCA and launch a solo career with another label.

But after the brief hearing before Mr Justice Lightman, BMG Records (UK) — the owner of RCA — announced it had reached an agreement on Sunday night to avoid a long and potentially acrimonious High Court action. Costs were awarded in its favour.

The judge said: "The parties have been very sensible in settling in this way and I congratulate them."

Williams, aged 22, was not in court to hear that the action and the counter-claim were dismissed on his undertaking — which was not revealed.

Friends said he was "very happy" with the decision and was going on holiday. In a written statement Williams said: "I am extremely sorry that I ever brought this case and I now fully accept the validity and enforceability of my BMG recording contract. I remain a BMG artist."

The decision was, however, an anti-climax for Williams' young fans — some of whom had waited most of the night for a chance to see him arrive at court.

"We are all so disappointed

that Robbie was not here," said Amanda Colton, aged 16, from East Ham, east London, who had waited since 3.30am outside the High Court in the Strand with her friend Zoe Pickett, also 16.

"It was freezing last night. But it would have been worth it if he had shown up."

Nicola Bramley, aged 17, from Chingford, Essex, said they could not understand why Williams had given in. "He seemed so determined to get his way in his new career."

Williams, who will return to Britain to start work on his solo record, had claimed that RCA had an exclusive call on his talents which he said was an unreasonable restraint of trade and therefore unenforceable.

Companies like Virgin and EMI were said to have dangled lucrative rival contracts. RCA said his present contract allows him to pursue a solo career, and would have sought an injunction stopping him going elsewhere.

Williams is said to have earned about £1 million from his time with Take That, a hugely successful enterprise which has produced seven number one singles and 10 million album sales.

He is also set to make £500,000 from the group's Greatest Hits album and has been reported as saying that the action would have cost him the lot, if it had ultimately gone against him.

Take That, who announced their split earlier this month, yesterday released their final single, a cover of the Bee Gees' hit How Deep Is Your Love.

Lost in space: one satellite worth £290m



An experiment to generate power from the Earth's magnetic field has ended in costly and embarrassing failure for Nasa

Astronaut Umberto Guidoni reflects on a failed mission

Ian Katz in New York

EMBARRASSED American and Italian space researchers are trying to establish how they managed to lose a \$443 million (£290 million) satellite while dangling it from the shuttle Columbia on a 12-mile, hi-tech "shoelace".

The Italian-built satellite and most of its electricity-conducting tether were yesterday spinning round the earth approximately 2,000 miles away from Columbia after the wire mysteriously snapped as the shuttle crew deployed the half-ton craft on Sunday night.

Nasa officials were refusing to comment on what might have caused the tether to snap inside the 40ft tower-like boom used



to launch the satellite but video footage showing apparent charring has prompted speculation that it may have been the result of overheating on sparks.

"Everything is a suspect at this point," said Chuck Shaw, the agency's lead flight director. "That's the reason the effort is to not disturb the crime scene until you're sure you've collected all the information."

Coming weeks after the 10th anniversary of the Challenger disaster, the loss of the satellite is a bitter blow to Nasa as it struggles to find a role in the post-cold war environment.

The Columbia mission was the second on which astronauts had attempted to deploy the satellite; four years ago the tether got caught on a bolt, causing it

to jam dangerously with the satellite just 850 feet from the shuttle.

"If you don't ever get your nose bloodied, you're not in the game," said Mr Shaw. "We got our nose bloodied this time." Columbia's seven-man crew, which includes two Italians and a Swiss, was said to be depressed yesterday as Nasa announced the shuttle's mission would be cut short by a day.

The experiment had sounded simple: by "dragging" the 12-mile cord through the earth's magnetic field, electricity would be generated and conducted back to the shuttle.

Researchers hoped such tethers could in future provide a cheap power source for spacecraft.

With a core of copper wire and a nylon coating that gives it the appearance of a shoelace, the tether is just a 10th of an inch thick. But researchers believed it was strong enough to hold the satellite which was supposed to exert no more than 10 lbs of force in space.

The Columbia crew planned to allow the satellite to fly 12.8 miles from the shuttle for two days. But around five hours after they began unwinding the cord with an electric winch, the astronauts noticed the tether was slack.

At 8.30pm, Dr Jeffrey Hoffman, a veteran of the failed 1992 mission, radioed mission control in Houston: "The tether has broken at the boom! It is going away from us."

Killing Fields actor found shot dead in Los Angeles

Christopher Hood in Los Angeles

HAIING NGOR — who was tortured by Cambodia's Khmer Rouge, escaped and went on to win an Oscar for his part in the 1994 film *The Killing Fields* — has been shot dead in Los Angeles.

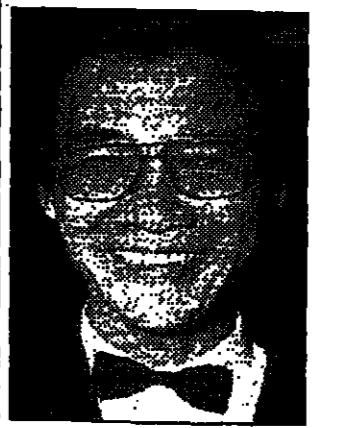
Police took his body away for a post-mortem yesterday after the actor was shot beside his parked car in the Chino town area of Los Angeles late on Sunday, apparently as he arrived home. Ngor, 45, who trained as a gynaecologist, died from a single gunshot wound. Police said no motive had been established.

Early indications suggested that it might be an attempted robbery in a neighbourhood close by a notorious crime area. However, police had not ruled out a link with Ngor's horrific past, a personal grudge, or even a stray bullet in LA's murderous streets.

Ngor was jailed for several years when the Khmer Rouge took over his country and killed millions of people. He escaped to Thailand four years later and in 1980 moved to the United States.

In 1994 he was unexpectedly offered a part in *The Killing Fields*, which closely resembled his own experiences. He played the Cambodian journalist Dith Pran, who was imprisoned after the Khmer Rouge takeover.

Obituary, page 10



Haing Ngor: film mirrored his real-life experiences

Buchanan activists busy raising Arizona

Martin Walker in Tucson, Arizona

THE rightwing insurgency of Pat Buchanan could score another upset victory in today's Republican presidential primary election in Arizona, where polls on the eve of the vote showed him just ahead of his main rival, Senator Robert Dole.

The nominal frontrunner and party elder, Mr Dole fired his costly campaign consultants yesterday, complaining that their opinion polls had been misleadingly optimistic.

The Dole campaign's advance work has been embarrassingly bad, with facilities booked for up to 1,000 people at a Phoenix airport rally on Sunday night, to which only 60 supporters showed up.

"The Dole campaign is imploding — it's not good news when you dynamite your own headquarters going into a primary," Mr Buchanan chuckled yesterday.

Mr Buchanan's momentum is becoming formidable in the wake of victories in the New Hampshire primary and in the caucus votes in Louisiana and Alaska, and his strong

second place in Iowa. Already ahead in the delegates won so far, Mr Buchanan could pocket another 39 delegates in Arizona's winner-takes-all election, before the next round of primaries in the fertile region of the South.

The latest local polls in Arizona show Mr Buchanan at 24 points, Mr Dole and Forbes at 23 points, Lamar Alexander at 10 points and the rest undecided. Mr Forbes could be Mr Buchanan's main rival, after spending \$4 million (£2.6 million) and blanketing the state's large retired population with postal ballots, at the peak of his opinion poll ratings.

"If the polls show it even, Buchanan will win because his supporters are true believers. They'd crawl through barbed wire to vote for him," Arizona's governor, Fife Symington, said yesterday.

Based in the churches, anti-abortion groups and gun owners, the Buchanan campaign includes some of the most passionate activists in American society. But he remains a minority figure, whose run of success in the primaries depends on the mainstream Republican vote being divided among Mr Dole,

Mr Alexander and Mr Forbes. Making a virtue of his lack of funds, Mr Buchanan has run an estate guerrilla campaign. "I write my own speeches and my own TV ads. I have no fancy campaign consultants, no professional pollsters and no focus groups and I fly coach class," Mr Buchanan told the Guardian yesterday. "I have no overhubs. The other guys spend 40 to 50 cents on professional fundraisers to raise every dollar. We advertise our 1-800-GO-

PAT-GO phone number, and keep every dollar that gets phoned in.

His national headquarters has a paid staff of six, who work from the basement of his house in a Washington suburb, and three more who travel with the candidate. He had four paid staff in New Hampshire for the primary.

The Arizona campaign is run entirely by volunteers, and his Florida effort is managed by his cousin, Senator Dole spent \$18 mil-

lion last year, \$7 million in January, and at least as much in February. This means he is starting to bump up against the legal limit of \$57 million for the primary campaigns — with the bulk of the primaries yet to come. His campaign consultants believed that money should be spent early.

That has proved disastrous advice, which could leave Mr Buchanan the best-financed candidate as the big Texas, Florida and California primaries loom next month.

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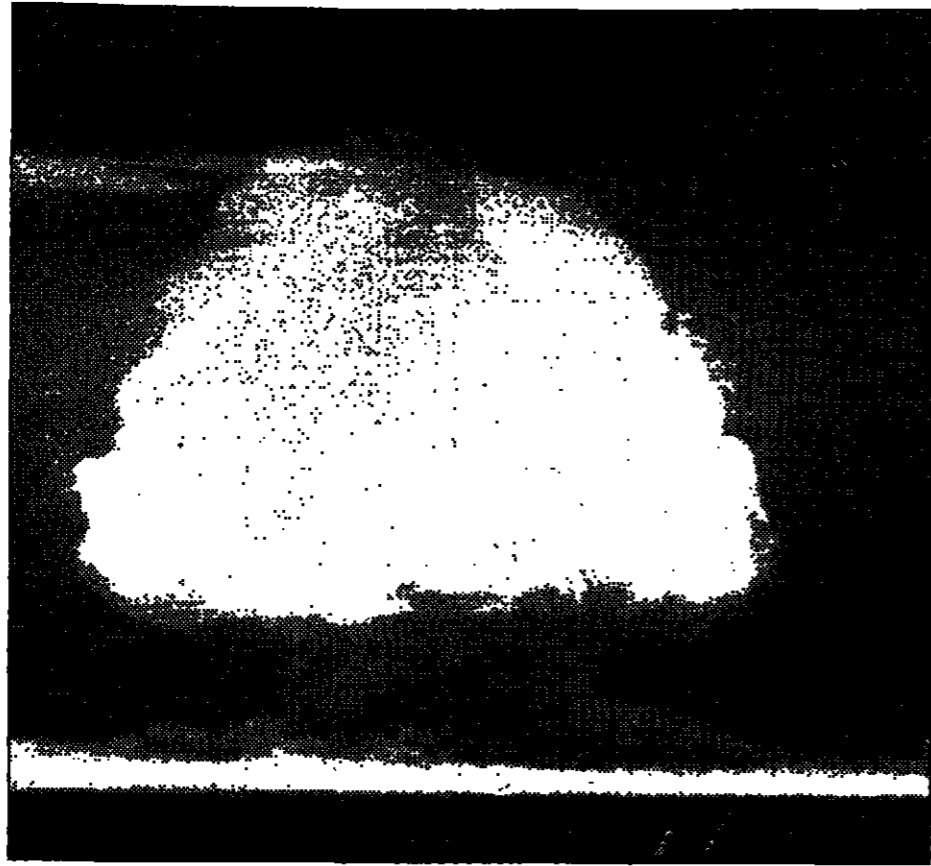
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سكنا من الاصل

Jonathan Steele meets Dr Ted Hall, the Cambridge scientist alleged to have passed the secrets of the first nuclear bomb to Stalin

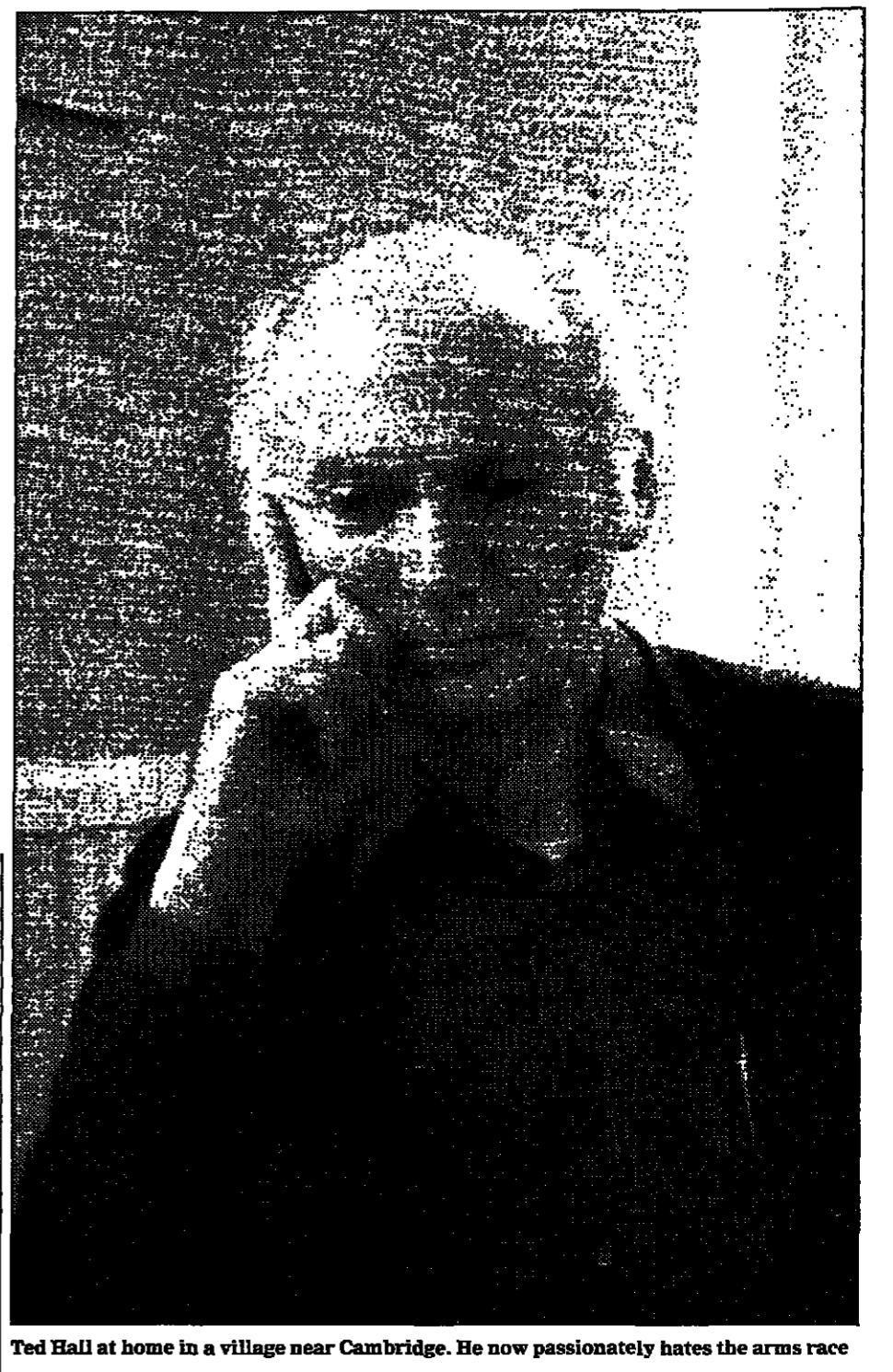
Was this man Moscow's atom spy?



The first atom bomb is tested, on July 16, 1945 in Alamogordo, New Mexico



Two months later, US scientists test the site for radiation



Ted Hall at home in a village near Cambridge. He now passionately hates the arms race

A SOFT-SPOKEN Cambridge scientist, now retired and suffering from inoperable kidney cancer, refused to comment yesterday on allegations that he was the missing link in one of the biggest espionage dramas of the century, the leaking of secrets from the United States atom bomb project to the Soviet Union.

In an exclusive interview with the Guardian in his modest terraced house in Newnham he revealed that he now passionately hates the nuclear arms race and feels that in the 1980s the Reagan administration was more to blame than the Russians for keeping it going.

Dr Ted Hall, a New Yorker who moved to Britain in 1962, was one of a team of brilliant young physicists recruited for the top-secret project code-named Manhattan, centred in Los Alamos, New Mexico. At the age of 18 he already had a degree from Harvard.

Although he was interviewed by the FBI in the early 1950s on suspicion of espionage, no action was taken. But newly released Soviet and US documents which have been seen by the Washington Post suggest that he may have been an informant for the Russians, referred to in KGB cables as "Mlad" (an abbreviation for "young").

In an article published in Sunday's Washington Post after interviewing several former US and Soviet intelligence officers, Michael Dobbs alleged that the secret of the

US bomb was passed to the Russians separately by two agents working at Los Alamos. One of them, Klaus Fuchs, a refugee from Nazi Germany, who was part of the British delegation to the Manhattan project, was convicted in Britain of espionage and sentenced to 15 years.

The other agent known as Mlad has never been unmasked. Although the US government learned his name several years ago, according to Dobbs, they declined to take action. The newly declassified material points to Dr

A Soviet agent 'visited Theodore Hall, 19 years old', and Hall 'handed over a report about [Los Alamos]'

Theodore Alvin Hall as a "likely candidate", he wrote.

Dr Hall has not denied or confirmed the allegations. In a statement put out by his solicitor yesterday he said that he had read the Washington Post story and "apart from observing that it contains numerous inaccuracies he does not wish to comment on it or talk about his time on the Manhattan project in Los Alamos... It would be detrimental to his health for him to be dragged into controversy

over allegations regarding events said to have taken place half a century ago.

In a Soviet intelligence document now in the public domain, which was sent to Moscow from the KGB in New York in November 1944, Dr Hall is identified by name. The document says a Soviet agent "visited Theodore Hall, 19 years old", and Hall "handed over a report about [Los Alamos] and named key personnel employed" on the atom bomb project.

The coded document is one of scores which the US government intercepted but which the National Security Agency has taken more than 40 years to decipher. The NSA only revealed details of the deciphering last July. The November 1944 document does not identify Ted Hall as Mlad but seven other KGB messages, according to the Washington Post, contain circumstantial evidence that this was so.

The information provided by the moles inside Los Alamos enabled the Soviet Union to build its own bomb two or three years earlier than would otherwise have been possible.

According to another intercepted KGB document, Mlad gave the Russians a description of four methods for producing enriched uranium.

Mlad also appears to have been the source of documents from Los Alamos which were handed to a woman courier, Leontine Cohen. According to Anatoly Yatskov, a former Soviet intelligence officer who controlled most of the

atomic spies in the United States, Cohen visited Los Alamos shortly before the first US bomb test on July 16, 1945.

She picked up the documents from a physicist and hid them in a box of Kleenex. When she reached Albuquerque station for the return train journey to New York, she saw plainclothes police checking passengers. She later boasted that she nonchalantly asked one of them to hold the Kleenex box while she looked for a ticket. Mr Yatskov said: "They never looked into the box. When she

The information provided by the Los Alamos moles enabled the Soviet Union to build its own bomb earlier

handed me the materials, they were about how the atom bomb was to be tested."

Cohen, who adopted the name Kroger, came to prominence in Britain in 1960 when she was arrested with her husband, bare posing as anti-quarian booksellers. They were released in a "spy" exchange and travelled to Moscow. Both are now dead.

Now aged 70, Dr Hall is a diffident man who says he wants to be remembered for his 40-year career as a

pioneer in the field of biological X-ray microanalysis. He took questions from the Guardian yesterday on his scientific work and his politics on condition that nothing was asked about the espionage allegations.

Known to colleagues as "the great historical figure of biological microanalysis", Dr Hall is suffering from Parkinson's disease and kidney cancer. He reluctantly described his "main achievement" as the development of equations which enabled scientists to look at X-ray data through electron microscopes and deduce the concentrations of various elements.

Like many Manhattan project scientists, including last year's Nobel peace prize winner, Dr Joseph Rotblat, Dr Hall turned against nuclear weapons.

He and his American wife Joan, who taught Russian and Italian at Cambridge, take a keen interest in politics and read a variety of leftwing journals. "We were members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, but it was only paper membership. We did not go on demonstrations."

Asked about the arms race, he said: "There was an enthusiasm for re-armament in the United States which the Soviet Union couldn't match. It's nothing to do with passing judgment on their political system."

Dr Hall added "Reagan... set out to bankrupt the Soviet Union because [he] thought it would bankrupt itself trying to follow... I think it happened."

Fact triumphs over fiction in battle for book-buying public

John Eazard

A HUNGER for self-improvement and for knowledge which will help people get jobs has hit three of the great staple genres of 20th century fiction—historical romances, modern romantic novels and adventure stories.

Instead, the sales boom in the 1980s has been in puzzle, quiz and cookery books, with dictionaries holding a high place in the market.

These unexpected trends are disclosed in the draft report of a new depth survey of the tastes of 1,800 book-buyers.

The study, Books and The Consumer, shows that between 1989-1993 fiction's overall share of the market slumped from 40 to 30 per cent, with its place largely being usurped by general and practical reference works.

A fifth of the shoppers studied by the research company Book Marketing Ltd was buying ten or more puzzle and quiz books every year. The books registered the biggest single gain in market share in 1989-93, from 5.6 per cent to nearly seven per cent.

"The winners were mainly reference non-fiction—and the losers mainly fiction", the draft report says. "More people bought a cookery book

than any other genre". BML's research director Leslie Henry said yesterday. "People want to know more and to improve themselves. They want the sort of information which will help them get jobs."

"Since they only have limited time to read books, they have been turning away from fiction. Cookery books have been helped by a huge TV push."

The trend will surprise analysts who see Catherine Cookson and Wilbur Smith still high in the best-seller lists. However, Mr Henry said, "One adventure author like Wilbur Smith may do extraordinary well but a lot of others aren't."

"Historical fiction isn't what today's young are looking for. Soap fans want Eastenders rather than something older."

Ms Greenhow, aged 23, from Harrogate, North Yorkshire, had been travelling in America for seven weeks with Stephen Bateman, aged 22, and Ruth Fleming, aged 23. All three had shared a house in Andover, Hampshire.

Mr Bateman, from Lancaster, and Ms Fleming, of Bowburn, Co Durham, shot themselves with hired pistols at a shooting range in Mesa, near Phoenix, Arizona, on February 21. The following day, Ms Greenhow killed herself at Lake Shasta, 100 miles away.

Briton who shot herself in US 'had mind of an extremist'

Barbie Duttler

A YOUNG British woman who killed herself in America in an apparent death pact with two friends left behind 100 pages of notes which showed her to have the mind of an extremist, police said yesterday.

Jane Greenhow, an astrophysics graduate, shot herself in the head at a Californian beauty spot last week, the day after her two travelling companions killed themselves at a shooting range in Arizona.

"Her mindframe was that of an extremist," said Lieutenant John Boyle, chief deputy coroner of Shasta County, northern California. "The notes are suggestive of suicide. She wasn't happy in England."

Ms Greenhow, aged 23, from Harrogate, North Yorkshire, had been travelling in America for seven weeks with Stephen Bateman, aged 22, and Ruth Fleming, aged 23. All three had shared a house in Andover, Hampshire.

Mr Bateman, from Lancaster, and Ms Fleming, of Bowburn, Co Durham, shot themselves with hired pistols at a shooting range in Mesa, near Phoenix, Arizona, on February 21. The following day, Ms Greenhow killed herself at Lake Shasta, 100 miles away.

They were all wearing black, paramilitary-style clothing when they died and had left behind a trail suggesting neo-Nazi sympathies.

Photographs of people in black military-style clothing and pages from firearms magazines were found in the London hotel where they had stayed before flying to America, and last week a doctor's appointment card bearing the words "Eternal Hell" and "Obergruppenführer Stasspolitzei" was found by a cleaner in a motel where they had spent a night.

Police are also investigating a cheque for \$5 million which appeared to have been made out to Ms Greenhow by Mr Bateman and was found among her belongings.

Both of the dead women graduated in 1994 with first-class astrophysics degrees from Leicester University. Dr Derek Raine, their former personal tutor, was adamant they had no neo-Nazi connections while at the university, saying they were quiet students with "very limited" knowledge of the world. Tony Robson, a researcher for Searchlight, the anti-racist magazine, said he was not aware of any links between the trio and any extreme right-wing groups in Britain. "They would have stood out a mile," he added.

"It's part of the long, slow march of the progressivists in British arts institutions. Burlington House has been on their hit list for some time. When these people were part of a fringe in the 60s no-one reckoned on how successful they would become. This is their boldest move, it shows how strong they feel they are."

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Dissident 'facing violence'

Seumas Milne

THE SAUDI opposition leader Mohammed al-Mas'ari would face physical danger and risk being held as a virtual prisoner if he was expelled to Dominica, his immigration appeal hearing was told yesterday.

John O'Connor, a former Scotland Yard Flying Squad commander who visited the Caribbean island to check security arrangements for Professor al-Mas'ari, said that a violent demonstration was planned by the main opposition party to prevent the dissident leaving his aircraft.

Giving evidence on the third and final day of the Immigration Appellate Authority hearing in London, Mr O'Connor said feelings were running high in Dominica over Britain's attempt to "dump" the political exile on the island. "My professional view is that he would be in physical danger from the moment of arrival."

Mr O'Connor, who now runs a corporate security consultancy, said he had been told by Dominica's police commissioner, Desmond Blanchard, that if Prof al-Mas'ari continued his political activism on the island, he "could find things difficult".

But the court was told by Stephen Richards, counsel for the Home Office, that Mr Blanchard had provided a statement in response to Mr O'Connor's written submission, saying his remarks had been "misrepresented".

Mr Richards accused Mr

O'Connor of producing a "slanted report directed to trying to show Prof al-Mas'ari would be in danger".

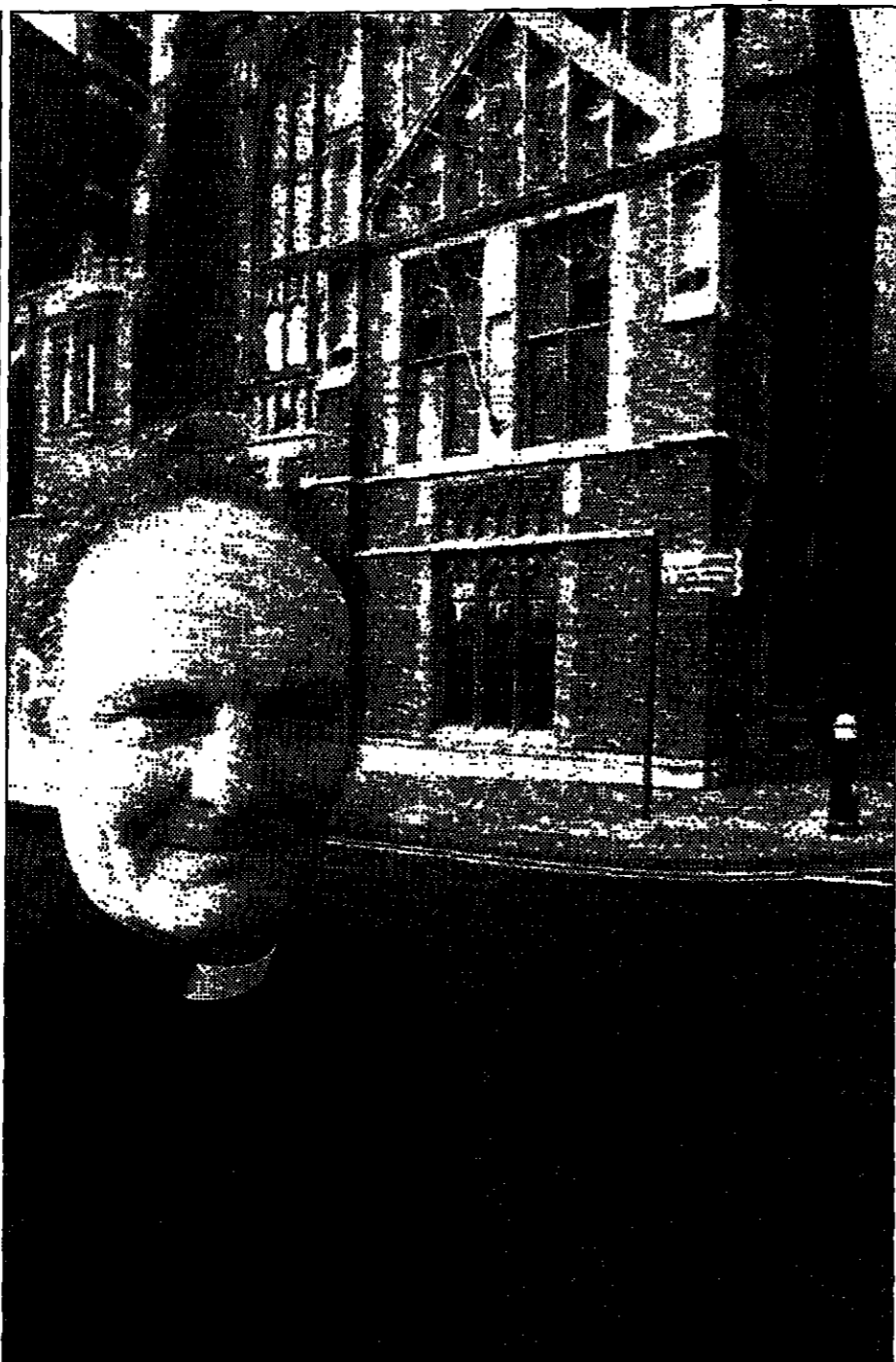
But citing the availability of firearms on the island and Dominica's "serious drugs problem", Mr O'Connor said he did not believe the police had sufficient manpower and equipment to offer Prof al-Mas'ari "long-term protection". He said the only way the dissident could be protected would be in a "fortress-like edifice with round-the-clock guards in a remote part of the island. If his telephone and fax were monitored or removed, he would be a "virtual prisoner", he added.

Summing up, Mr Richards said that there was "no credible evidence" that Dominica was unsafe, nor was there any reason to doubt the Dominican prime minister's assurances that asylum would be granted.

The Saudi ambassador had given the British government a pledge that Saudi Arabia intended Prof Mas'ari no harm.

In his summing up, Andrew Nicol QC, for Prof al-Mas'ari, said if the dissident leader continued his fax campaign against the Saudi regime from Dominica, the island might come under pressure to act against him.

The Chief Special Adjudicator, Judge David Pearl, adjourned the hearing until next Tuesday, when he will deliver his ruling. If he finds in favour of the Home Office, Prof al-Mas'ari will seek leave for judicial review of the decision to deport him. If the ruling favours Prof al-Mas'ari, the Home Office can appeal.



Canon David Hutt... 'We have exhausted all practical alternatives' PHOTOGRAPH BY MARTIN ARQUES

Property losses force sale of Church library

Madeleine Bunting on why 100,000 books are to be moved

ONE of the country's largest and oldest Anglican theological libraries is to be sold and its 100,000 books dispersed, following huge losses in property speculation.

The future of Ston College Library was decided yesterday at a tense extraordinary general meeting in the Victorian Grade II listed building overlooking the Thames in central London after a long and acrimonious battle between clergy and lay readers.

The Court, the college's governing body of elected London clerics, was accused of defeatism and blind panic in abandoning an historic and valuable institution.

"The Church of England is more interested in hand-clapping and making coffee than in education nowadays," said John Oddy, a college member and former library officer. "It used to have the reputation of being a learned body, now the clergy are all amateurs. If Ston goes under it will be the last time I will go over to the Roman Catholic Church."

Dr Oddy accused the Court of being "seized by a blind panic".

The Rev Richard Parsons, a member of the College for 30 years, accused the Court of high-handedness and lack of consultation. "To sell without proper planning, I think, is one more indication that the Church of England has got a death wish."

Readers pleaded for the library's survival and said the Court should launch a fundraising appeal and apply to trust funds in the US. Dr George Carey, the Arch-



George Carey. Offer to head an appeal rejected

bishop of Canterbury, who used to use the library as a student, has offered to head an appeal for the library but was turned down.

Canon David Hutt, the acting-president of the college, maintained that an appeal was unrealistic.

"We have exhausted all practical alternatives. Like many church institutions, everyone wants them to remain exactly as they were but we haven't had the money to maintain the building or expand. We need half a million to bring the building up to scratch."

The plight of Ston College bears striking similarities with the Church Commissioners, who lost £800 million of the Church of England's historic assets in property speculation in the late 1980s. The College lost half of its build-

ing assets when it embarked on an ill-ventured attempt to save up its future by cashing in on the property boom — borrowing £400,000 in 1986 to refurbish part of its property for letting.

No tenant materialised, and it was eventually sold last year, interest on the loan wiped out virtually the entire proceeds of the million pound sale.

"It was the loss of a major asset which has put us in an impossible position — it was property market speculation which went wrong," admitted Canon John Halliburton, the honorary librarian who became a member of the Court, the college's ruling body two years ago.

He added: "We don't want to point fingers."

The college, with its hammer-beam roof, stained-glass windows and shelves full of dusty books, is now likely to be handed over to barristers or bankers. Bids close on Thursday, with the sale expected to raise over a million pounds.

Ston College was founded to raise the intellectual calibre of City clergy, more recently it has become the haunt of lay scholars such as Enoch Powell. The book collection, which includes 16th century Wycliff manuscript bibles and a rare Jewish Babylonian Talmud, is to be split between Lambeth Palace and King's College London.

Ston College plans to use the proceeds of the sale to set up a meeting place in one of the City churches, where meals and periodicals will be available.

Labour faces Swindon rerun

Seumas Milne Labour Editor

A CONFIDENTIAL Labour Party report on the parliamentary selection in Swindon North — which has pitched a Rover union convenor against an adviser to shadow chancellor Gordon Brown — warns that "there may have been tampering with the votes" in a "fundamentally flawed" procedure.

The 32-page document sharply criticises the conduct of party officials and clears Jim D'Avila, who is backed by the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union (AEEU), of all allegations of breach of the party's rules or code of conduct.

Labour's national executive committee will now face the choice of re-running the disputed selection contest in the marginal seat or imposing its own candidate when it considers the latest findings at its meeting tomorrow.

Last month the party agreed to withdraw an earlier report on the selection process — which Michael Wills, a London television producer and friend of Mr Brown won last September by 114 votes to 94 — after a High Court judge rejected it as unfair to Mr D'Avila.

The judge stopped short of ordering a rebalot, but said he did not believe the party could adopt any other course of action.

The new report recommends Mr Wills's selection should not be endorsed. Its authors say that "in clear breach of the procedure, the postal votes were opened in advance of the count".

It adds: "Whether or not it was done innocently [the breach] left the vast bulk of the votes vulnerable to being tampered with."

The report states: "Sufficient doubt has been cast by the evidence upon the result of the count to render the reported outcome of that ballot unsafe." Criticisms of Mr D'Avila by party officials — including the south-west regional secretary — are described as "inaccurate", "untrue", "highly misleading" and "highly damaging".

The argument will now shift at tomorrow's NEC meeting as to whether Labour's interests are best served by a rebalot — supported by Mr D'Avila and the AEEU — or whether the NEC itself should make the choice.

The meeting will also consider a report by Unity Ballotting Services on the Glasgow Govan parliamentary selection, in which Glasgow Central MP Mike Watson beat the cash-and-carry businessman Mohammed Sarwar by one vote after 62 ballot papers were declared invalid. The report is understood to have uncovered serious flaws in the process and there is speculation the NEC will order a rerun in the new constituency.

'Cupboard' fire safety plan alarms Mod's disabled staff

DISABLED Ministry of Defence employees are alarmed at plans to shut them in "cupboards" if a fire breaks out in offices.

They would be left in fire-resistant rooms to await rescue while able-bodied colleagues are evacuated.

Minutes of a meeting on refurbishment of MoD offices in Glasgow state: "There are to be fireproof areas, similar to large cupboards, where disabled persons will be placed for safekeeping during a fire."

Alf Morris, Labour MP for Wythenshawe and a former minister for the disabled, will ask Michael Portillo, Defence Secretary, for a Commons statement on the rooms.

He said it was hard to see how the safety of wheelchair users could be ensured. "I am concerned that disabled people left in a blazing building will still be vulnerable."

An MoD spokesman insisted that the "sanctuaries" met safety standards. She added: "The use of the word 'cupboards' is unfortunate. They are like normal rooms with windows, but they have smoke-seals and double doors, each of which is worth half-an-hour's time.

"They are part of the emergency escape staircases, where there is a high level of protection from fire. If someone cannot get down the stairs in a hurry, they can go into the sanctuary to await the emergency services." She said these sanctuaries were now standard in office blocks.

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Another RAF aircraft crashes

David Fairhall Defence Correspondent

AN RAF Tornado bomber crashed yesterday 20 miles from its base at Bruggen, in Germany. It was the ninth British military aircraft to be lost this year and prompted renewed calls from the shadow defence secretary, David Clark, for an independent inquiry.

The pilot and navigator of yesterday's crashed GR-1 Tornado sustained minor injuries when they ejected. The aircraft fell in open ground near the village of Issum.

The RAF announced an immediate board of inquiry. But Dr Clark argued that in the light of this year's record — seven RAF crashes in as many weeks, plus two involving Royal Navy Sea Harriers — this was inadequate.

"What they have at the moment is an investigation of each accident one by one," he said, "but we need to be looking deeper to see if the RAF and the Royal Navy are suffering from overstretch — if this is the result of pushing men and machines too far."

The nine crashes so far this year, at a total national cost approaching £200 million, compares with 10 losses in the whole of 1995.

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'Horrific catalogue' of sex attacks by man aged 55

14 life sentences for child molester

Sally Weale

A 55-YEAR-OLD man who preyed on children as young as three in a string of sex attacks over 20 years was yesterday given 14 life sentences.

Derek Mitchell, a married man, had earlier been found guilty in respect of 20 charges of indecent assault, rape, and serious sexual assault at Cardiff crown court. Passing sentence, Judge Martin Stephens said the catalogue of crimes were a horrific breach of trust.

Mitchell, who lived in Splott, Cardiff, and was unemployed, began his abuse in the mid 1970s, putting his six young victims in fear of their lives if they told of their ordeal.

His crimes only came to light when one girl reached adulthood and told of her physical and mental torment.

A psychiatrist who examined Mitchell said he "posed a grave danger to children for the foreseeable future", the court heard.

Mitchell was convicted by a jury last November of a series of rapes and sex offences against girls as young as eight.

He raped one girl when she was just 10, and continued to



Derek Mitchell: Youngest victim was aged three

force himself on her for five years. He also raped one of her 13-year-old schoolfriends. The court was told that on one occasion he encouraged a boy and girl, both aged 11, to have sex together.

Then in December a second jury convicted him of abusing four boys between the ages of three and 10 during the 1980s and 1990s.

He preyed on them for up to five years before the offences came to light.

Peter Jacobs, prosecuting in the second trial, said Mitchell "systematically" indecently assaulted and had sex with the boys.

The attacks were all carried out in Mitchell's bedroom,

each boy being abused in the presence of the others. He threatened to give one youngster a "good hiding" if he ever told anyone what was happening.

The boys maintained their silence until June last year. Social services were finally called in when a friend became concerned about the "rude games" being played by the boys.

Judge Stephens said Mitchell's actions were so perverted only life sentences were appropriate adding: "It can only be wondered what long-term damage you have caused to these children."

Mitchell was given six life sentences for separate rape attacks on his schoolgirl victims.

He was given a further eight life sentences for the serious sexual attacks on the four young boys.

He was given five years for a serious sexual assault on a girl of 10, three years for indecent assault on a girl of eight, and two years for indecent assault on another girl.

He was also jailed for four years for indecent assault on a boy of four, six years for indecent assault on a boy of six, and a further three years for another indecent assault.

Judge Stephens said the sentences should all run concurrently.



Downe Hall in Bridport, Dorset, a listed building whose redevelopment has been agreed by English Heritage despite fierce opposition PHOTOGRAPHS FRANK MARTIN

Inquiry mars sell-off

David Hencke
Westminster Correspondent

THE Insolvency Service has launched an inquiry into a collapsed private company one of whose directors is the former head of Capita Managed Services — the firm bidding to take over the Insolvency Service itself.

The disclosure comes as ministers are expected to announce on Thursday that Capita has won its bid. John Jasper, a former director and chairman of Capita Managed Services, resigned seven weeks ago from the company. He left after the company had already bid to take over the running of the Insolvency Service.

Ten days previously Midsummer Computing Ex-

pany of which Mr Jasper was a director, went into liquidation after a government quango, the Commission for New Towns, petitioned the High Court. Taxpayers are owed nearly £100,000 in unpaid rent and service charges. The company was wound up a month ago.

Mr Jasper said yesterday: "I resigned from Capita for personal reasons. I was an investor in Midsummer but did not play an active part in its management."

The liquidation of the Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, company has prompted an inquiry by the receivers based at the Northampton office of the Insolvency Service. They are checking on all the directors, including Mr Jasper, aged 55, who has recently become a director of another firm, Lusis Busi-

arm of the privatised utility Welsh Water.

Lusis has taken over a big distribution contract from Midsummer for a US company, Willoughby Associates, to set up a software package for 80 museums, including the Science Museum.

Phillip Oppenheim, the corporate affairs minister, was recommended by his civil servants to split the £40 million privatisation of the Insolvency Service among the three short-listed bidders, including Capita.

A spokesman for the Department of Trade and Industry said: "We intend to interview the directors."

Labour's small business spokeswoman, Barbara Roche, has written to Martin O'Neill, Labour chairman of the Commons trade and industry select committee, ask-

Prince's builders branded 'wreckers'

Maev Kennedy on a complex dispute over the future of a Georgian house in Dorset and its garden 'of national importance'

THE Prince of Wales's favoured property developer, who is building the model village at Poundbury in Dorset, is involved in a bitter planning dispute over a Georgian house in the nearby town of Bridport.

Many national conservation bodies oppose the proposals of C G Fry & Co to develop the house and garden in the heart of the market town. However, West Dorset district council, as well as English Heritage, regard the proposal as the only way to preserve

it breaches the local development plan.

The conservation bodies believe it could be sold on the open market without planning permission, and the Garden History Society regards its 16-acre garden as of national importance.

"This is an amazingly good garden, and this development will wreck it," said the society's David Lambert.

The Georgian Group and the Victorian Society also back the concern of local residents, and a petition opposing development has over 1,300 signatures.

C G Fry proposes to divide the Grade II*-listed building into two houses and three flats, and build eight houses in the garden.

"We are preserving most of the garden and ensuring the house's future," company director Eddy Fry said. "If we don't get permission

somebody else will develop it or the house will rot, which would be a tragedy."

In return for planning permission, the firm would restore the house, built in 1789 — which it has agreed to buy from the Snook family, who have owned it for 50 years — and give an eight-acre site on the hill-top behind to the town.

Mr Lambert believes the case exposes a breach in the national protection for historic properties, and that the district council and English Heritage — which has statutory responsibility for listed buildings — missed the importance of the garden, which is not on the national register of historic gardens.

Catherine Searle, who lives in sight of the house and has led the local protest, says: "If we can't protect this, a listed house, in a conservation area, in an area of outstanding natural beauty, from a development which is against the local development plan, then what is the point of having any controls?"



Local resident Catherine Searle, who is fighting the plan

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High suicide rates defy jail support schemes

Alan Travis
Home Affairs Editor

SIXTY prisoners took their own lives last year, almost the same number as in 1994, despite more rigorous Prison Service policies on bullying, self-harm and suicide prevention.

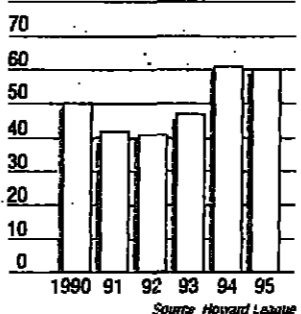
The figure released yesterday by the Howard League for Penal Reform also showed that so far this year 11 inmates have died inside jails in England and Wales.

Although some progress was made in the early 1990s with the Prison Service's "suicide awareness support unit" and the pioneering use of "listener schemes", it appears the number of suicides has returned to the pre-1990 peaks.

There have been 301 prison suicides since 1990 in England and Wales of which 56 were people aged under 21. They included three 15-year-olds and three 16-year-olds. Seven of those who have died have

Prison deaths

Number of prison suicides in England and Wales.



been women. The worst jails have been Liverpool where 16 have died in the past five years; Brixton, south London, which has had 12 deaths and Norwich with 10.

"It is scandalous," said Frances Crook of the Howard League. "Despite the Prison Service's efforts, the fact remains that 300 prisoners experienced such desperation

that they took their own lives."

The release of the figures coincided with the publication of the first results from the use of compulsory drug tests in all 136 prisons in January in which 1,300 inmates tested positive — mainly for cannabis — in the first four weeks. Prisoners found to have used drugs have an average of 12 days added to their sentence.

Those shown to have used illegal drugs represented about two-fifths of the inmates who were tested. The National Association of Probation Officers estimates that the Prison Service can expect at least 24,000 inmates a year to test positive.

At each prison about 10 per cent of the inmates are selected at random. In addition suspected users are also ordered to be tested. So far about 8 per cent of those randomly chosen have refused to be tested and have faced the penalty of an extra 23 days added to their sentence.

World Service journal faces drastic cuts to stem losses

Andrew Cull
Media Correspondent

AMAGAZINE designed to promote BBC World Service radio is facing drastic pruning after sustaining losses of more than £200,000.

The 11 staff on BBC World magazine — a monthly international version of the Radio Times sold by subscription — are facing redundancy.

The magazine is to be relaunched in June as a low-cost listings publication. Although run as a commercial enterprise, the magazine was funded by the BBC World Service which receives grant-in-aid from the Foreign Office.

The BBC launched the magazine in November 1982. Over three years it cost £1.2 million to produce. When losses soared this year by an additional £200,000, partly due to the rising cost of newsprint, the BBC decided the losses were no longer sustainable.

The scale of the deficit was an embarrassment to the BBC at a time when it has been campaigning against cuts.

A BBC World Service spokeswoman said: "The magazine is regarded as a very important promotional tool, but we are under a lot of pressure and cannot sustain such a commercial risk."

The relaunched format will contain the listings for World Service radio and Worldwide TV, but many of its 100-plus feature pages face the axe. The spokeswoman admitted: "There are going to be substantial job losses."

The World Service suffered a £5.4 million cut in its 1996-97 budget. It is negotiating with the Foreign Office over funding for 1997-98, but could face £20 million cuts.

The cutbacks come at a time when the World Service has just posted its highest listening figures, with an estimated 140 million listeners in more than 100 countries.

Award for Sense and safety

Derek Malcolm enjoys British successes, with reservations, at Berlin's film festival

EMMA Thompson's adaptation of Sense and Sensibility has triumphed at the Berlin Film Festival. Directed by Ang Lee of Taiwan but with a huge British input — not least from Jane Austen — it walked off with the Golden Bear for best film.

The film, also nominated for a clutch of Oscars, is officially American because it was backed by Hollywood. It could have been made with European money, but it was felt that US cash would assure it better distribution — a sorry comment on the state of

European cinema. The prize was hoisted by the press as too safe a choice.

Britain's Richard Loncraine shared the director's prize for Richard III with Yim Ho, Chinese director of The Sun Has Risen, which also won the International Critics Award. Britain also won the Children's Film Festival with Chris Bould's My Friend Joe, a co-production with Ireland and Germany.

The performance prizes went to Sean Penn as the condemned murderer in Tim Robbins's Deal Man Walking

— the film most people thought should have won — and to Anouk Grinberg as a prostitute who loves her work in Bertrand Blier's My Man.

There were times when Berlin's 46th festival seemed more Hollywood than Hollywood. John Travolta, star of Get Shorty, arrived by private jet with 12 "professional friends" including hand dresser, make-up artist and bodyguard.

But away from the glitz, the consistently productive International Forum of Young Films showed one of the festival's finest films: Richard Gordon and Carma Hinton's The Gate of Heavenly Peace, a three-hour epic about the Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing in 1989.

Jonathan Freedland reports from Washington on the fevered cold-war posturing provoked by Havana's downing of two planes piloted by Cuban-Americans

US poised to punish Cuba anew

THE United States president, Bill Clinton, moved to freeze relations with Cuba back into the ice of the cold war yesterday as Washington came under intense political pressure to punish Havana for bringing down two small US civilian planes on Saturday...

The United Nations moved to ostracise President Castro's government, as they convened an urgent session of the security council to condemn what the US ambassador, Madeleine Albright, called a "blatant violation of international law".



Vocal minority... Members of a Cuban-American paramilitary group protest in Miami about the incident in which Cuba downed two US civilian planes

sign who have their burrows in Florida" and said it had hit the "pirate planes" out of the "sacred and irrefutable duty to defend [Cuba's] national sovereignty".

Evoking memories of the 1960 shooting down of a US spy plane — and the capture of Gary Powers, its pilot — Cuban officials also claimed yesterday to be holding a member of the Miami-based exile group whose planes were downed on Saturday.

craft were apparently shot down by a Cuban MIG fighter. The Cubans claimed the planes were violating Cuban air space, and were repeatedly warned to stay away.

But told the authorities, "We will go ahead because that is our right as free Cubans." Brothers to the Rescue — Cuban exiles who regularly fly over the Florida straits — said its pilots had flown over international waters only.

Western diplomats in Havana said yesterday that the patience of the Castro regime had been sorely tested by a series of hostile sorties by US-based exiles.

istry statement said. Diplomats suspect a new disregard for international opinion about Dr Castro, after nearly 18 months in which he has curried favour abroad.

Restraint plea to Aegean rivals

THE European Union last night refused a Greek government appeal to throw its clear political support behind Athens in its dispute with Turkey over some small, uninhabited islands in the Aegean which threatened to escalate last month into armed confrontation.

have criticised the decision to ratify the customs union with Turkey while there are continuing human rights violations in the Turkish state's war against Kurdish separatists.

Scavengers stalk the ruins of Serbian Sarajevo

Julian Borger meets at close range the brutal armed gangs who prey on the sick and old in the city's abandoned suburbs

THE pistol twitched between my face and Mirko's, as if trying to make up its own mind. Its owner's drunken, bloodshot eyes betrayed only indifference.

These are the last days of Serb Sarajevo. The negotiations and the appeals for a reprieve are over. Most of the local politicians and the police have commandeered trucks and driven away, leaving behind the lawless wreckage of a society.

intending to stay behind. The drunk, gray-bearded Serb who had tumbled out of an unlit cafe to stride jerkily through the snow towards us had recruited ex-soldiers determined to make the most of the power vacuum.

Local police have gone, leaving the lawless wreckage of a society

turned away and busted themselves with their trailer. "Who the fuck are you and what right do you have to be here?" asked the leader, breathing brandy fumes into Mirko's face.

Extremists jeopardise EU mission

THE German appointed mayor of Mostar by the European Union, Hans Koschnick, resigned yesterday after warning that Croat extremists were trying to undermine the international agreement guaranteeing freedom of movement and the unity of the ethnically-divided city.

Widow and Sharon Stone play the devil with Clouzot remake

Paul Webster in Paris

THERE is an unexpected twist to the American remake of Henri-Georges Clouzot's 1954 thriller, the most terrifying of French murder films.



Simone Signoret starred in Clouzot's 1954 hit

that she had started legal action to ban the remake, claiming that the producer, Morgan Creek, and the director, Jeremiah Chechik, had plagiarised the original.

the husband, who is the supposed victim. The remake was shot in secret, but from photographs in Premiere the US version is inspired by Clouzot's original sets: the school, the swimming pool and the bath.

remake — set in her home town of Pittsburgh and retitled Diabolique — had not been a happy experience.

Sharon Stone, who stars with Isabelle Adjani, said on French television that the



Sharon Stone: ashamed of taking part in US version

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Advertisement for a road atlas. It features the phone number 0800 029 029 and the website http://www.rac.co.uk/. It also includes a small image of the atlas and a form for ordering.

Reckless Arab driver killed by irate Israelis

Derek Brown in Jerusalem

AN ARAB-AMERICAN motorist who lost control of his car and ploughed into a bus queue on a busy Jerusalem road yesterday was shot dead by Israeli civilians.

One Israeli woman was struck by the car and killed. The bizarre tragedy came in the traumatic aftermath of the two attacks on Sunday by Islamist suicide bombers, in which 27 people died.

First reports of yesterday's incident suggested that there had been another militant attack. One account had the car colliding with a bus on the main road north of the city centre at French Hill, one of the boundaries between the Jewish and Palestinian communities of Jerusalem.

Within minutes, a huge fleet of ambulances, fire engines and police vehicles rushed towards the incident. The crashed car, a black Fiat hired from a Palestinian firm in East Jerusalem, was checked by bomb disposal experts, but nothing was found.

As traffic jams built up, details became clearer. The dead driver, not yet named, turned out to be a citizen of the United States of Palestine origin, on a family visit to Ramallah, north of Jerusalem.

He was heading along a section of the six-lane road notorious for reckless driving, and seemed to have been travelling at high speed. Police later found long skid-marks on the road surface, indicating that the driver had lost control.

The road is heavily used by Jewish settlers, many of whom routinely carry licensed firearms. Last night, a police spokesman, Eric Bar-Chen, said that after the car slammed into and assaulted a paramilitary policeman. "At that point civilians, thinking the driver was a terrorist, shot and killed him," he said.

As well as the two people who died in the incident, 22 Israelis were injured in the crash.

The incident grated on Jerusalem's nerves, already scraped raw by Sunday's horrific attack in which 24 Israelis

died in the suicide bombing of a crowded commuter bus on one of the city's main streets. Another Israeli died when a human bomb exploded at a bus stop used by hitch-hiking soldiers outside the city of Ashdod. More than 80 people were wounded in the blasts, responsibility for which was claimed by the militant wing of the biggest Islamist group in Palestine, Hamas.

Yesterday as Israel buried its dead, the prime minister, Shimon Peres, told the Knesset (parliament) that the self-proclaimed Palestinian Authority headed by Yasser Arafat, must act against Islamist militants based in the autonomous parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. There would be no value to the majority which Mr Arafat won in January's Palestinian elections, if an armed minority undermined the authority.

"The Palestinian Authority must decide to disarm the terrorists or risk endangering its authority," Mr Peres said. "The Authority must outlaw those who act contrary to the law, as the agreement between us requires."

"The Palestinian Authority must do its part, we will do ours. We will not halt the peace process — we will continue with it. At the same time, we will take all appropriate means in order to strike at terrorists everywhere, both before and after they commit their criminal actions."

Mr Peres said that the latest closure of Israel's borders with the West Bank and Gaza would continue "as long as is required from a security standpoint". Tens of thousands of Palestinians, mostly day labourers, have again lost their livelihoods.

Security sources have hinted that the closure imposed in the immediate wake of Sunday's bombings, could last for months, until after the Israeli election on May 29.

Critics of the government are now questioning the relaxation. They say it was known Hamas militants were eager to avenge Yehya Ayyash, the top bomb maker killed on January 6, almost certainly by Israeli agents.

In Gaza yesterday, Palestinian police continued to round up known Hamas activists. At least 20 are now in custody.

Mandela's plea wins reprieve as Paris tries to stop EU's efforts to free inter-regional commerce

S Africa escapes French trade threat

John Palmer in Brussels

FRANCE launched a big political offensive yesterday to slow down the proliferation of free trade agreements between the European Union and other global regions. But after appeals from President Nelson Mandela and EU leaders it agreed to drop a threatened veto of an agreement with South Africa.

The agreement is seen as the linchpin of the EU strategy to bolster post-apartheid South Africa and the development of a southern African regional customs union involving several neighbouring states. After four hours of debate in Brussels EU foreign ministers were finalising a compromise last night, under

which negotiations with Pretoria for a free trade agreement could begin while the wider implications of such agreements are studied in greater detail.

"France is willing on this occasion to make a special exception for South Africa, because of the obvious political considerations," the French foreign minister, Hervé de Charette, said.

The French government has made no secret of its fear that the spread of free trade agreements is making it more difficult to contain the rise of unemployment in Europe.

But the force of its attack on the commission's plans for agreements with Mexico and South Africa took other governments by surprise.

Its ambassador to the EU, Pierre de Boissieu, directly

attacked the strongly free trade policies of the European trade commissioner and former British minister Sir Leon Brittan.

In an apparent attempt to limit the diplomatic fallout, the French European affairs minister, Michel Barnier, tactfully and briefly left the

agreements with the four Mercosur bloc states — Paraguay, Uruguay, Brazil and Argentina — and it is considering whether to negotiate a similar agreement with the United States.

It is also committed to creating a Euro-Mediterranean free trade zone within 15

years. But it was a proposed agreement with Mexico which triggered the French attack.

"The commission is incapable of understanding French logic," Mr De Boissieu declared. Later French government officials claimed that the commission had "not done its homework" to discover whether such regional pacts would be acceptable to the new World Trade Agreement.

"We are devaluing our world trade relations. [France] has to take a stand... to do a global evaluation of these agreements."

Replying to the French government, Sir Leon said the World Trade Organisation believed that regional trade agreements were "broadly positive". But commission officials conceded last night that the whole issue of global free trade agreements would now have to be studied more closely.

"We can accept some of the French arguments about the dangers of such agreements," one said.

"But we need to know whether or not these arguments are a cover for a lurch back to more protectionist policies. If so, that would have considerable implications."

Although no other EU government explicitly backed the French stand yesterday, there is concern about the pace of global free trade at a time when there are still 18 million unemployed in the EU.

"This is maybe the start of a very profound debate about the limits of free trade in the modern world," one diplomat said.

"Everyone wants to help democracies such as South Africa. But the fashion for free trade may be drawing to a close."

'We are devaluing our world trade relations. France has to take a stand... to do a global evaluation'



A man lies dead after Bangladeshi police opened fire on hundreds of protesters who tried to set fire to a railway signal system near Dhaka yesterday. Three were killed and more than 50 injured on the third day of a country-wide protest called by opposition parties. The protest has been extended until tomorrow

Harare muzzles weekly voice

Andrew Meldrum in Harare

ZIMBABWE'S press has been firmly muzzled to prevent criticism of President Robert Mugabe, just three weeks before presidential elections.

The weekly Financial Gazette, the leading independent newspaper, has abandoned its anti-government stance under financial and political pressure.

Despite the Financial Gazette's new policy, the Mugabe government has stepped up its campaign against the paper. The state-controlled Zimbank has reportedly refused to reschedule its debts.

Two front page stories in

the state-owned Herald newspaper have predicted the collapse of the Financial Gazette by June. The articles are seen as warnings to the business community to refuse assistance to the paper.

Because all Zimbabwe's daily newspapers, radio and television are state owned, the loss of the Financial Gazette's independent voice leaves it with no regular critical view of the government.

Last week the publisher told reporters not to write about "personalities", particularly that of the president. The paper scrapped its wildly popular "Muckraker" column, a wickedly witty send-up of the government.

The assistant editor, Iden Wetherell, resigned last week saying that "attempts from any quarter to shield President Mugabe from criticism are misguided and prejudicial to effective journalism."

Mr Wetherell's resignation follows the suspension of the editor, Trevor Ncube, because he published a Reuters story last month which showed President Mugabe in an unfavourable light. The story, from Maseru, Lesotho, stated that President Mugabe demanded his plane be permitted to land immediately. The Maseru control tower reportedly replied that President Nelson Mandela of South Africa must land first because his plane arrived first.

The Financial Gazette publisher, Elias Rusike, has seen his newspapers crumble in the face of government opposition. The Daily Gazette, which exposed corruption scandals, folded last year and the Sunday Gazette closed earlier this month. The papers were widely read but advertisers shied away for fear of losing government contracts. Mr Rusike sought new financial backers. One potential investor, South Africa's Times Media Ltd, was blocked by the government from buying more than 25 per cent of the publishing house and withdrew its offer.

Coverage of the presidential race in the state-owned media amounts to slavish reporting of President Mugabe's speeches. Only the most scanty and partisan coverage is granted to the opposition candidates: Bishop Abel Muzorewa and the Rev Ndabaningi Sithole. The Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation has also banned coverage of the independent MP Margaret Dongo

Tribal strife racks Zaire's refugee-packed border

Ethnic tension, witchcraft and primitive weapons lie in wait for troops drafted in from the capital, writes Greg Barrow in Sake

ZAIRE has begun sending extra troops to Masisi province in the east, where it believes that Hutu refugees from neighbouring Rwanda are inflaming ethnic tension with the native Hunde people and disrupting agricultural production in the region, which was once Zaire's breadbasket.

Hunde, Hutu and Tutsi communities have been raiding each other's villages and engaging in vicious battles with little more than spears, machetes and bows and arrows.

Farms and ranches which once fed cities as far away as the capital Kinshasa are being systematically looted, and the meat from stolen cattle is being sold for knock-down prices in the Rwandan refugee camps. The International Committee of the Red Cross, one of the few relief agencies still working in Masisi, estimates that almost half the region's 600,000 people are now displaced from their homes.

"It's a very, very brutal conflict," says Pieter Borador, an ICRC official in

Goma. "Masisi is not far from Goma and Goma is a very civilised modern town, but in Masisi there's real tribal fighting going on. The people look like warriors from another age, and they're targeting everyone: tiny children, women and even old people."

Relief agencies, already struggling to cope with the Rwandan refugee problem in Goma, are being overwhelmed by the flight from Masisi. In one week at the beginning of this month 3,000 Tutsis fled from Masisi to Rwanda. Many of

them belong to families which have lived in Zaire since colonial boundaries were drawn a century ago. Now they have decided that their adopted home is too dangerous.

They say the situation has deteriorated drastically since Rwandan Hutu refugees arrived in Goma. Hundes and Tutsis in Masisi accuse Hundes of collaborating with members of the former Rwandan army and interahamwe militia which led the 1994 genocide. Officials say that former soldiers and militia-men in the Goma refugee camps know they cannot stay for ever and are looking for places to settle in the Zairean interior.

"The Hutu people who have been living in Masisi have joined forces with their brothers from Rwanda," says Mateka Bangi, a Hunde chief who was forced to flee his village in Masisi. He now lives in a makeshift shelter of palm leaves and bamboo in a church compound in Sake, a town on the edge of Masisi province.

"I know very well that the former Rwandan military and the interahamwe want to take over Masisi and make it an annexe of Rwanda," he says.

"It's highly regrettable to see the Rwandan Hutu militia bringing their ethnic strife here and making the Hunde people suffer in the

country of their birth."

The government hopes to solve the problem by putting more troops in the region, but few soldiers are keen to go there. Last week a Zairean officer's body arrived in Goma in 22 pieces, and many other soldiers have met a similar fate.

In an attempt to scare off the opposition, Hunde and Hutu fighters are using witchcraft. Aid workers report seeing fighters wearing banana fronds and fetishistic necklaces of human skulls. Such stories circulate widely and troops drafted in from the rather more sophisticated Kinshasa are expressing little desire to confront the terror in the bush.

Ginger & Arthritis

If you suffer from arthritis, you should know about a new book *The Complete Arthritis Handbook*. This book, which won the Norton Pain Relief Award, contains the latest up-to-date information on arthritis, including the new surgical and medical breakthroughs for a wide range of rheumatoid and osteoarthritis problems.

It covers such diverse aspects as what foods doctors recommend you eat... and which ones to avoid, the effect of vitamins and which drugs the experts recommend. There is also a special section on devices and prostheses which can help, organisations you can turn to and other contacts that can help — together with their addresses and telephone numbers. There's even a section covering old wives' tales, folklore and other unusual information.

Order this book now, within seven days, and receive FREE 'Ginger and Arthritis'. This new study by two top scientists in Denmark shows how they discovered a regular intake of ginger can relieve pain and reduce the swelling in aching joints. To order your handbook, leather-styled copy of *The Complete Arthritis Handbook* send your name, address and book title with payment (cheque or Visa/Access with expiry date) of £9.5 which includes postage and handling to Carmel plc, Dept A 34, Alresford, near Colchester, Essex CO7 3AP, or telephone their 24 hour order line on 01206 825600 (quoting ref: A 34). Allow up to 14 days for delivery. You may return the book any time within three months for a full refund if not satisfied.

News in brief

Equatorial Guinea president romps home in 'farical' poll

President Teodoro Obiang Nguema has claimed more than 99 per cent of the vote in Equatorial Guinea's controversial presidential poll, writes Chris McGreal in Malabo.

With more than half the votes counted, opposition candidates dismissed the result as a farce and accused the president of manipulation, intimidation and fraud.

In the capital, Malabo, where the opposition won last year's municipal elections, it rarely picked up more than a handful of votes at each voting station. At some, there was not a single ballot for Mr Obiang's opponents. At others more votes were counted than there were registered electors.

The five opposition candidates pulled out before the election in protest at laws heavily tilted against them and tampering with the voting rolls. But the government refused to take their names off the ballot.

Egypt publishes Gadafy stories

Egypt's state-run publishing house has printed 100,000 copies of a book by the Libyan leader, Colonel Muammar Gadafy, extolling rural life, for sale during the Cairo book fair.

"Gadafy's name will make the book sell very well," Samir Sarhan, director of the Egyptian General Book Authority, said.

The book, a collection of short stories, praises rural life, where people can cultivate the land and admire sunsets and other natural beauty. — AP.

Secret police 'caused blast'

Albania's president, Sali Berisha, yesterday blamed a car bomb blast which killed four people and injured 30 on the country's former secret police — the first act of political violence since the fall of communism in 1990.

"This is the most terrible terrorist act," Mr Berisha told Albanian radio. "This is a fascist act organised by the forces of the former secret police."

The bomb, thought to contain 110lb of explosives, was parked outside a store owned by one of Albania's biggest concerns in Tirana. — Reuter.

Whites back down

A former whites-only school in the African town of Foggettarsus that was forced to admit blacks has suspended plans to fight the decision through South Africa's highest court, officials in Johannesburg said yesterday. — Reuter.

Chun denies graft

South Korea's former president, Chun Doo-hwan, denied taking bribes on the opening day of his corruption trial in Seoul yesterday, saying a vast fortune he amassed in office had come from political donations, but the former general vowed to protect the identities of those who benefited from his billion-dollar political slush fund after he left office. — Reuter.

Envoy's return

Nigeria's military government yesterday formally welcomed back ambassadors recalled by their home governments last November in protest at the hanging of nine Ogoni minority rights activists, state radio reported. — Reuter.

Carlos's wife freed

Prosecutors in Berlin confirmed yesterday that they had dropped all charges in connection with bomb attacks in Germany and France against Magdalena Kopp, the estranged wife of the international guerrilla "Carlos the Jackal". — Reuter.

Violence mars Sierra Leone vote

VIOLENCE disrupted multi-party elections in Sierra Leone yesterday to end nearly 20 years of military or one-party rule.

In the capital, Freetown, mortar explosions and heavy gunfire were heard coming from army barracks. In Bo, rocket-propelled grenades forced all but two of 35 polling stations to close. Shooting

was also reported in Kenema in the southeast. There were no immediate reports of injuries, but residents in Bo said the aim appeared to be to scare off voters.

Vast but orderly queues had formed early at polling stations in the West African country, whose economy has been wrecked by five years of civil war. Reuter.

A chain of triumphant demolitions, starting at the stroke of midnight 1999, could be just the thing to put some fizz and excitement into the proceedings.

Catherine Bennett

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Scott has the final word

At last, a serious discussion of the issues he raised

DO NOT let the closeness of the result of last night's vote between the parties deceive. Anyone listening to or reading the Commons debate on the Scott report yesterday will rightly conclude that it was an overwhelming moral and intellectual victory for Parliament over the over-mighty executive. Or, to put it more accurately, that it was a victory for the Scott inquiry process itself. For the most striking feature of the debate yesterday was the divide between those MPs from all parties who talked seriously about the Scott report, and those, principally those who spoke for the Government, who simply did not. Ever since the report was published ten days ago the Government have consistently attempted to avoid any serious discussion of the content of the Scott report. That was why they launched the report in the highly selective and manipulative manner that they did. It is why they allocated only one day for yesterday's debate when there should have been two. It is why they have ensured that the Opposition should have no say in Commons business this week. It is why the Prime Minister played no part in yesterday's debate. It is why they have persisted ever since with the absurd pretence that Scott was an inquiry into Opposition charges, not Government conduct, and a judgment on the behaviour, not of Government ministers, but of Opposition shadow spokesmen. And it reached its logical climax yesterday in a speech from the President of the Board of Trade which barely quoted from the report in any way and which dealt with the matters arising from Scott in only the most unhelpful way. Having decided that they could not expect to win the argument about ministerial responsibility in the arms for Iraq affair, the Government's tactic yesterday was to speak at elaborate length but in extraordinarily vague terms

about the changes which will now follow from the report. Many of these had been announced or foreshadowed earlier, but Ian Lang tried to present them one more time yesterday as a constructive and amollient response to the Scott findings. There will be discussions about the way parliamentary questions on arms exports are handled. The Government will participate in a select committee inquiry into ministerial accountability. The supervision of Customs and Excise prosecutions will be tightened. The use of public interest immunity certificates will be looked at once again. In other words, after three years of inquiry into the whole process of government and an enormous investigative effort by Scott, the Government have barely come up with a single substantive and definite measure of reform. This does not add up to a serious response to the issues or the findings, as Richard Shepherd pointed out in a powerful and moving speech from the Conservative backbenches. In Parliament yesterday Mr Lang played it deliberately low key. That has been the strategy all along, and it has been a rotten-minded dereliction of the government's responsibility. The issues are too serious for that, and the situation called for powerful and honest assault. It got it from Robin Cook, whose demolition of the Government's case was masterly and wholly based in serious argument. Mr Cook showed yesterday, as he has showed throughout this whole saga, that he is Tony Blair's most valuable parliamentary asset. More than half a century ago, disgruntled Conservatives called on Labour to "speak for England" in the nation's hour of need. As a Scotsman Mr Cook cannot be expected to do that. But when the moment came he spoke for people of all parties yesterday - though sadly for too few Conservatives - and we are all in his debt for that.

Laughing all the way from the bank

Profits are booming at a time when corporate investment is static

WE HAVE now entered an era - as Lord Desai reminded us in the Lords last week - in which wealth creation is no longer accompanied by job creation. This has long been true in manufacturing industry but now it is a regular occurrence in the City as well. It should therefore come as no surprise that Midland Bank raised its profits by 10 per cent last year (to almost £1 billion) while shedding five per cent (2,328) of its staff. Abbey National also boosted its profits by 10 per cent to £1 billion while only shedding 200 jobs (after allowing for acquisitions). This pattern is likely to be repeated during the week when other high street clearing banks publish their results since the surge of rationalisation, which has cost 100,000 jobs during the past six years, has yet to run its course. None of this makes it any easier to be a public relations officer for a bank. Banks get criticised for inefficiency when they make losses and for profiteering when they make big profits. In the past consumers and small businesses felt they were being made scapegoats for the banks' sorry history of discovering new sources of bad risks (like dodgy governments, property companies and overstretched home owners) to which they could lend money. The longest running grievance is the interest rates charged by banks for loans. If you lend money to the banks, most of them will pay you interest ranging from 0.50 per cent (for up to £500) to 3.20 per cent (on 90-day notice) unless you

take advantage of one of the Government's tax-exempt schemes. Yet if you want to borrow the same amount back on a credit card, the clearing banks will still charge you anything up to 25 per cent for the privilege despite the fact that inflation has dropped to under 3 per cent. With a credit card charge of 25 per cent, the real rate of interest (after allowing for inflation of 2.9 per cent) is an astounding 22.1 per cent, or nearly eight times the rate of inflation. If that doesn't count as usury it is difficult to know what does. The banks might argue that they need to charge a lot because of the bad debts incurred on credit cards - though that begs the question whether defaults would be so high if interest rates were lower. The other disconcerting thing about bank profits is that they are booming at a time when corporate investment is static. According to the latest GDP figures gross fixed capital formation in the whole economy was zero in the second half of last year (and manufacturing investment fell by 9 per cent in the final quarter). However, in this case the banks may not be to blame. True, they have plenty of money to lend, but companies are also flush with cash themselves thanks to a 160 per cent rise in gross trading profits since 1991. Companies in general (including banks) are much more interested in spending their surplus funds on take-over bids before a Labour administration clamps down on them. Short-termism is still alive and well despite the boom in profits.

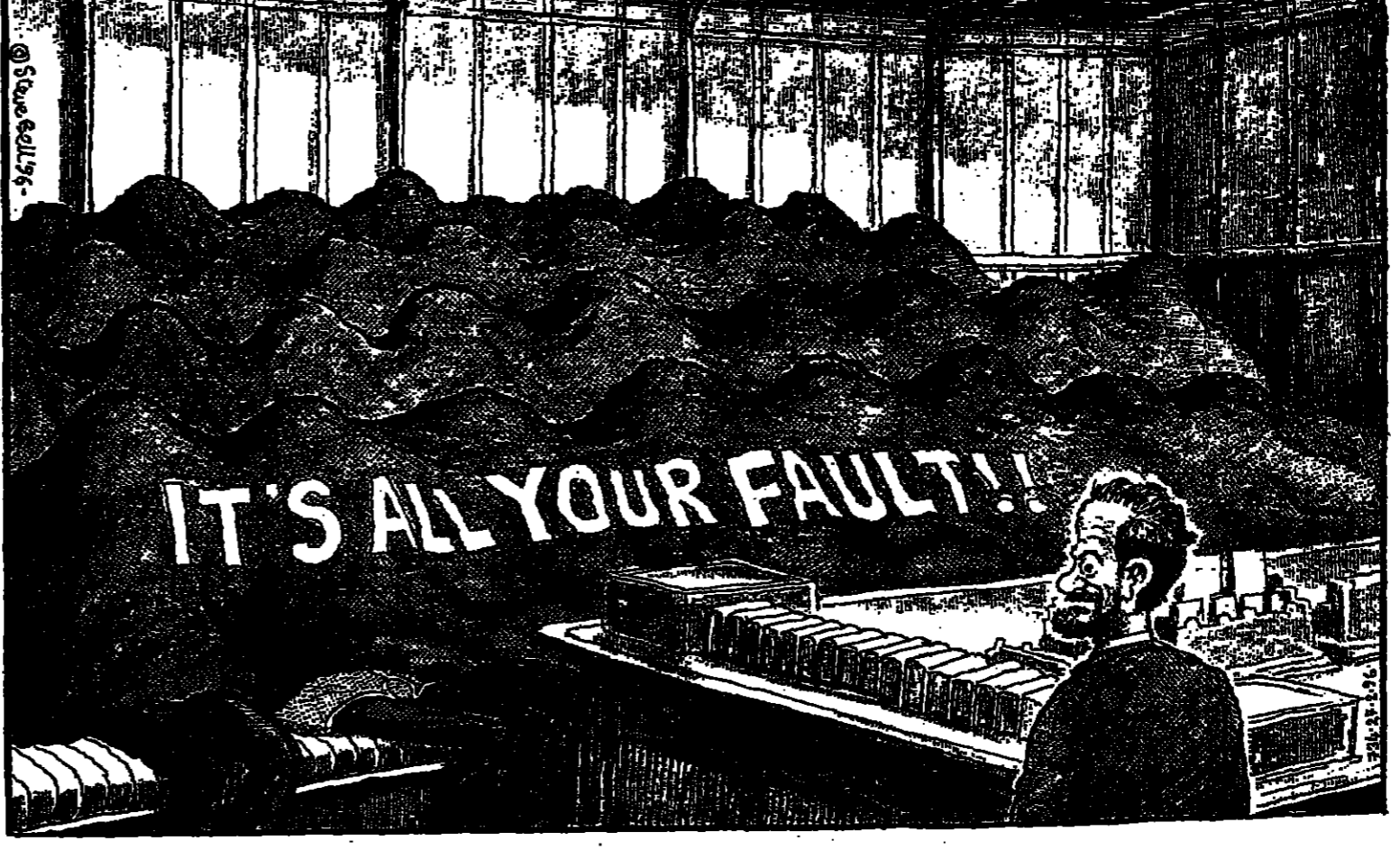
Provocation and folly over Cuba

Shooting planes is wrong. So is pursuing a cold-war vendetta.

SHOOTING DOWN civilian planes must always be wrong, particularly when there is no possible question of misidentification. For the Cuba government to take such action now, as the US presidential campaign gets under way, is also an act of great folly. But it is hard to have any sympathy for the exiles who on Saturday put themselves provocatively in the way of danger. US monitoring agencies confirm that all three planes from the anti-Castro group "Brothers to the rescue" entered the Cuban air defence identification zone and were warned by Cuban air traffic control that it would be dangerous to proceed further. Within 20 minutes at least one plane had penetrated into Cuban airspace. There is a dispute over whether the two planes shot down also crossed the 12-mile limit, but they were wilfully heading that way. The surviving pilot and leader of the group, Jose Basulto, is no stranger to

Cuban airspace. Twice before he and his pilots have dropped leaflets over Havana urging the Cuban people to rise up against Fidel Castro. That was no humanitarian action but plain incitement to rebel which provoked the Cuban government to issue a threat against any private planes violating their airspace in future. The Federal Aviation Administration responded by threatening to revoke Mr Basulto's pilot license. But as so often the US authorities appear to have backed off curbing the exiles. None of this excuses the Cuban action which was quite disproportionate to the offence. But it illustrates the tragedy of a situation where Cuba has been victimised for so long by its giant neighbour. There are real issues to discuss - such as refugees, trade, and nuclear power. To pursue this cold war vendetta is as counter-productive as the latest Cuban response.

GOVERNMENT CONCESSIONS ON OPENNESS-ACCOUNTABILITY



Letters to the Editor

Insights into the political mind

Replies to a wedding invitation

REGARDING your article 'The Mandelson/Liddle idea of a £5,000 dowry for married couples is all a ruse, February 26'. I was at Mill Hill School with Denis in the 1930s. His universal nickname was 'Wetty'. Griff Thomas, Keldwith Drive, Wyndermere, Cumbria LA23 1EQ.

VERY belatedly, your quote ascribed to me about Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore - 'A nasty little man' - came to my attention (Singapore salutes Blair, January 9). Not only have I never said anything like that, but Lee Kuan Yew is a good friend and, more important, I respect his tremendous achievements. Henry A Kissinger, 350 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10022.

YOUR report (Rival candidate threat hits Labour hopes, February 26) says I am 'threatening to sabotage the Labour Party's hopes of winning Essex at the next election'. Unless the party drops John Lloyd, I confirm that I propose to stand should the NEC reaffirm its endorsement of Mr Lloyd; but it is the NEC's endorsement alone that puts the seat at risk. Peter M Jackson, 82 Vandon Court, Petty France, London SW1H 9EG.

YOU report that 'the Liberal Democrats would like [Peter Thurnham] to be their candidate in Westmorland' (February 24). Which Liberal Democrats? I have heard no member of our local party suggest that he should be our candidate. We already have an excellent prospective candidate, democratically selected, and no other candidate will be imposed on us. John Horne, Chairman, Westmorland and Levenside Liberal Democrats, Shammies, Lickbarrow Close, Wyndermere, Cumbria LA23 2NF.

SINCE many religious experts now believe that Christ was born in 4 BC, should not the Millennium Fund be paying out this year? Vic Smith, 175 The Greenway, Kichingham, Uxbridge, Middx UB8 0LT.

Final words

JULIA Hartley-Brewer (Letters, February 26) continues deliberately to mislead your readers. The fact that I asked her to write to your paper does not excuse her disclosing material to Matthew Norman in the first place for use in his spiteful and abusive vendetta against one of her own sources. There is nothing wrong with my memory, as she impudently suggests, but a great deal wrong with her journalistic ethics. (Dr) Julian Lewis, Conservative Research Department, 33 Smith Square, London SW1P 3RH.

Fertile ground for debate

WHEN I read your article about the dramatic reduction in the sperm counts of men born after 1970 compared with those born before 1959 (British males losing 2pc of sperm count every year, February 23), I began to think about what was unique to that decade. I couldn't be led down the avenues of smoking, alcohol, and the environment because my mind kept homing in on the straws. What happened then? What was so different

The princess and the pique

PRINCESS Diana did not 'snub' Pakistan's prime minister 'by preferring to be a guest of the premier's leading political opponent, Imran Khan...' (Diana heads for diplomatic row, February 20). Ms Bhutto did not invite the princess in the first place. While we were conscious that Princess Diana would be Imran Khan's guest, she is a member of royalty and, in keeping with protocol, we did offer the Governor's House in Lahore should she wish to use it, and extended an invitation to tea or a meal with Ms Bhutto who would be in Karachi during the visit, should the princess have the time. It is, therefore, highly unfair to Prime Minister Bhutto to snub one's nose at her for doing the right and proper thing. The 'close friends' you refer to is a Lahore socialist who has never even met Ms Bhutto. And why should the prime minister be furious anyway? Imran has yet to form a political organisation, he has yet to show his electoral strength; and how is it

A Country Diary

AUSTRALIA: Wilson's Promontory ('the Prom') is the southernmost tip of the Australian mainland, 130 miles southeast of Melbourne. Its rocks and mountains were formed 400 million years ago and once stretched between Victoria and Tasmania. When the climate warmed and sea levels rose, the landlink was cut. The navigator, Bass, named the promontory after a London friend of his companion, Flinders. It is a nature reserve of 49,000 hectares, with ocean on three sides, and as timeless a space as you would hope to find. The wide, sandy bed of the tidal river winds out to Norman Bay. On either bank stand mysterious, rounded boulders, smooth and streaked by the action of the elements across vast stretches of time. It would be hard to miss the sense of Aboriginal presence here: there is archaeological evidence, and myths and names like those of 'Loo-arn' and 'Tiddalik' survive. The slopes and mountains are thickly covered with vegeta-

A prescription for the NHS

FUNDAMENTAL principle of good management is that the people with the right skills do the right work (Owning GPs 'mean crisis ahead for NHS', February 22). Hence burying GPs under the growing mountain of paperwork does not seem to be an efficient use of limited resources or professional skills. This problem is already being addressed in some practices with the introduction of practice managers, good use of IT and relocation of work. Of equal, or maybe greater, importance are the wide range of initiatives being explored on the clinical front, including telephone triage systems staffed by nurses to reduce the number of night calls; the increasing range of work undertaken by nurse practitioners and practice nurses such as cervical screening, asthma and diabetic clinics, health promotion and discharge follow-up; IT consultation ser-



IT SHOULD not take much

even now to convince many of those who have resorted to private health cover that their premiums would be better invested in an effective NHS (Roy Hattersley, Comment page, February 23). For the next Labour government, the first step could be a surcharge on private health care premiums, the proceeds being directed to supporting and developing the NHS. George Adams, Croft Road, Hastings, East Sussex TN34 3FH.

Handwritten Arabic text at the bottom of the page.

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Finance Guardian

Bull Ring sold for £30m

BIRMINGHAM'S Bull Ring, a landmark shopping centre since the 1960s (pictured right), has been bought for £30 million by the property developers Hammerson, who hope to redevelop the site.

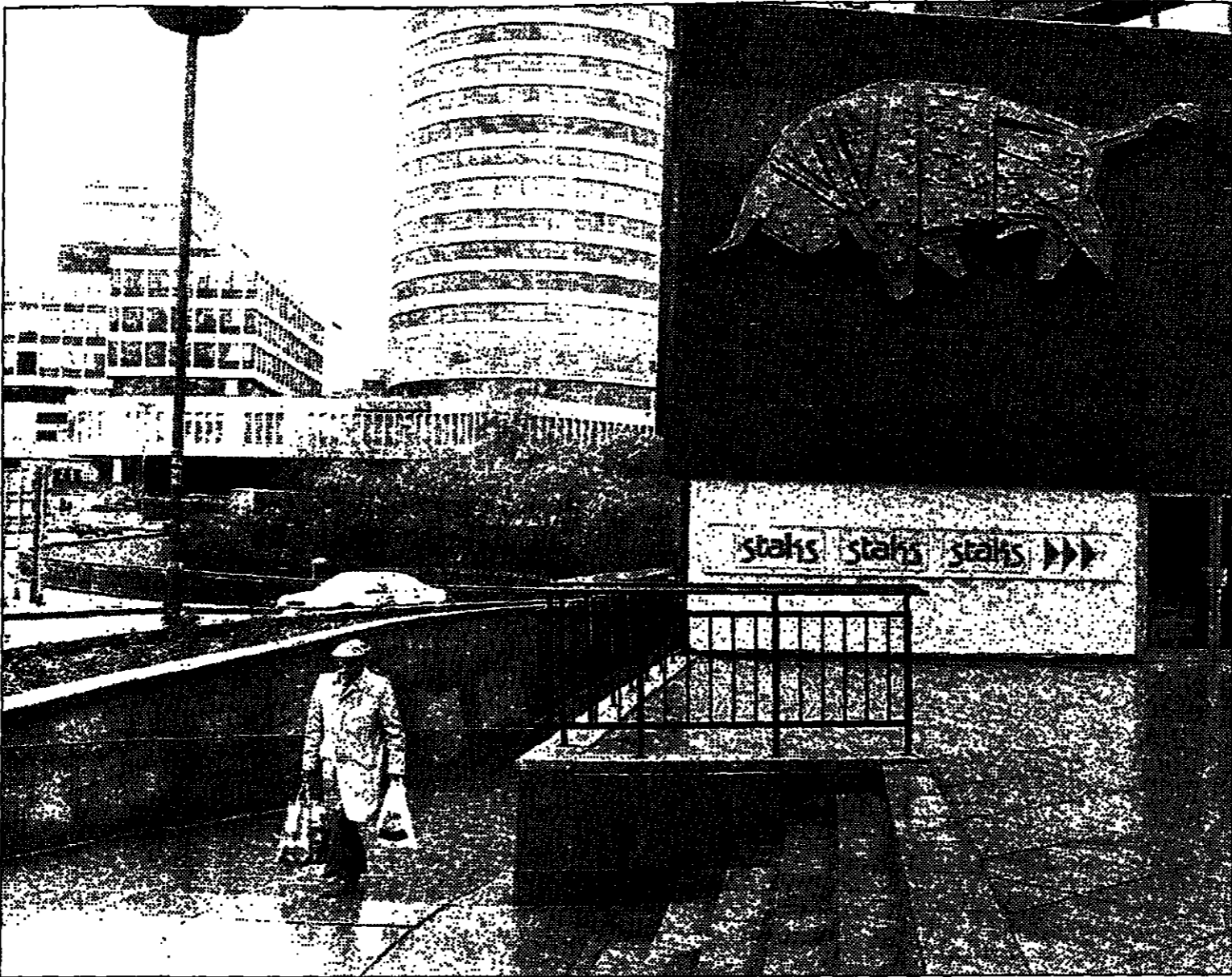
Hammerson's chief executive, Ronald Spinney, said yesterday: "Our vision is to build a new shopping centre of up to 100,000 square metres, including unit shopping and departmental stores, which will revitalise the Bull Ring by substantially improving its links with Birmingham's existing prime retail shopping areas."

Hammerson said that it had exchanged conditional contracts with a subsidiary of the Swedish pension and life insurance company Försäkringsbolaget for purchase of the leasehold.

The contract is subject to the Secretary of State's agreement to give planning consent for redevelopment of the site, which Birmingham City Council granted at the end of last year.

Hammerson owns an array of shopping centres, including Brent Cross in north London, Merseyway in Stockport, Freshney Place in Grimsby, and The Liberty in Romford.

PHOTOGRAPH: ROGER HUTCHINGS



Notebook

Hong Kong risks blight on banking



Edited by Alex Brummer

THE size and spread of the profits of HSBC Holdings, owners of Midland Bank, the Hongkong Bank Group and Marine Midland in North America, sets it apart from other UK-based institutions. With its operating profits of £2.7 billion, it dwarfs even food giant Unilever, which is often viewed as being more like a small country than a consumer products firm. The same, more or less, applies to HSBC which, despite all the changes it has seen, remains Hong Kong's flagship.

Certainly, in 1995 almost £1 billion of income came from the UK's Midland Bank, but a turnaround from when it fell under HSBC's control. Indeed, in 1996 First Direct, Midland's innovative investment in telephone banking and financial services, was profitable for the first time. Now that the start-up IT and marketing costs have been absorbed this is potentially a hidden jewel for the complex HSBC empire.

Lesarri, that a deal can still be agreed peaceably. Certainly, Rentokil has looked wrong-footed from day one, when it was forced to make a premature announcement because of leaks on the Stock Exchange, and later, when it clumsily sought to pick key BET businesses.

The one reason an agreed deal would make sense is to reduce advisers' fees. If there is one factor which left a bad taste in the Granada/Forza nuzzle earlier this year it was the amount of cash squandered on fancy teams of financial advisers and underwriters, which would have paid a tidy special dividend to the shareholders of each company or, alternatively, allowed a huge increase in investment.

Including underwriting, it now looks as if Rentokil's net costs could reach an astonishing £57 million. Add to this BET's defence costs and there will not be much change from £100 million. This is proving to be the real scandal in hostile takeovers — the wanton squandering of shareholders' funds on over-priced financial advice.

If the institutions would use their power more constructively to bring about agreed deals instead of focusing on bidding up the price and short-term dealing profits, Anglo-Saxon capitalism might be rather healthier.

Home Office set to relax gaming industry rules

Reforms may hearten bingo operators, but they raise fears organised crime will stage a casino comeback, writes Dan Atkinson

THE biggest changes in nearly 30 years to laws governing the multi-billion pound gambling business will be put forward by the Home Office today.

The move comes amid fears that a deregulated casino industry could again become a tempting target for international crime.

Rules brought in to help stamp out mafia-type infiltration of gambling clubs in the 1980s are likely to be relaxed as the Government acts to strengthen London's competitive position against emerging gaming centres in western Europe and the former Communist countries.

Today's blueprint is also set to ease controls on bingo halls; here the push for change has come from opera-

Board — the agency that regulates Britain's 118 casinos — has fought a behind-the-scenes battle to retain the levers of its power to keep casinos "clean". The Home Office is likely to suggest changes chiefly in the peripheral areas where the board has been content to see some relaxation.

In particular, the rules on payment are likely to change to allow debit cards to be used along with cheques; whether credit cards will be permitted, in the teeth of board opposition, remains to be seen.

The number of towns and cities designated as suitable casino venues is likely to be increased, and there will be considerable easing of the total ban on casino advertising. Gaming clubs will probably be allowed to advertise in publications aimed at tourists.

But suggestions that the 48-hour "cooling off" period — during which a prospective member has to wait before gaming — would be cut to 24

Bremer Vulkan 'made illicit use of £386m grant'

Last Traynor in Bonn

THE embattled German shipbuilder Bremer Vulkan slipped closer to bankruptcy and deeper into embarrassment yesterday, when the country's privatisation agency accused its management of illegally diverting hundreds of millions of marks in subsidies meant for two shipyards in eastern Germany.

The BVS agency said it was initiating legal action against former Vulkan managers for breach of contract in diverting more than 80 per cent of DM650 million (£386 million) in subsidies from the state beneficiaries — the two shipyards bought by Vulkan after German unification five years ago.

In a withering indictment of mismanagement and cover-up in the cover-up, Heirich Horn, the BVS chief, said an independent audit ordered last week had shown that DM716 million was funnelled elsewhere, mostly into the Vulkan group's loss-making engineering subsidiary in western Germany and to help purchase other companies.

Mr Horn charged that leading German banks and local politicians were implicated in the cover-up. He said that the lost monies could not be traced by studying Vul-

kan's annual and quarterly reports, but that the independent audit had revealed what happened to the missing millions.

A meeting in Bremen last August of Vulkan management, regional political leaders, and officials of the company's main creditor banks confirmed that the money had disappeared, he added.

Bremer Vulkan, Germany's biggest shipbuilder, filed for protection against its creditors last week, effectively declaring itself insolvent, after recording losses of DM1 billion last year. The group employs about 23,000 people in its shipyards, and in engineering and electronics subsidiaries.

Intensive talks aimed at salvaging Vulkan's future by drumming up fresh loans continued in the north German city yesterday after Karl Van Miert, the European Union's commissioner for trade competition, complained that the situation at Vulkan was much worse than originally feared.

Company executives say that Vulkan will be unable to repay the money that was earmarked for the eastern German yards. The banks are being asked to come up with more loans, but are understood to be insisting on state guarantees before agreeing.

Shares boost for Rentokil men

Lisa Buckingham

DIRECTORS of Rentokil, the environmental and industrial services company which has launched a £1.9 billion hostile takeover for rival BET, sold £5.5 million worth of shares in their own company less than six months ago, it emerged yesterday.

The disposals were disclosed in Rentokil's offer document for BET, which the aggressor said was an attempt to be "moderate" and leave the way open for an agreed deal. Rentokil's opening assault was regarded as vitriolic.

BET, which vigorously disputed the claim that it had never refused to negotiate a takeover with Rentokil, dismissed the predator's arguments as "backward-looking and outdated". The bid failed to take account of its "impressive" recent recovery, BET said.

The offer document revealed that Rentokil's chief executive, Clive Thompson, exercised options on 2.1 million shares, which he immediately sold in early September at a profit of £4.39 million. Christopher Pearce, the finance director and the only other executive in the boardroom, sold 670,000 of the 1.4 million share options he exercised last autumn at a profit of £1.68 million.

The company declined to comment on the reason for the disposals, made when Rentokil's share price was 363p. Mr Thompson retains 2.8 million Rentokil shares. Mr Pearce has 817,000. Shares in BET gained 2p to 201p — just 2p above the share value of the offer. Rentokil's share price climbed by 1p to 251p.

Rentokil, which calculates that costs for the bid will be £57 million, accused BET management of carrying out a rationalisation exercise, providing better operating margins only by making acquisitions. Mr Thompson said his group's record of providing

Jurassic Park giant moves to buy controlling stake in Cray

Mark Tran in New York

SILICON Graphics, the computer company that created the graphics for Jurassic Park, yesterday came to the rescue of Cray Research as it moved to acquire a 75 per cent stake in the struggling supercomputer company for \$783 million (£508 million).

Founded in 1972 by Seymour Cray, Cray Research became the world's leading supercomputer maker, selling machines — some costing as much as \$30 million — to the CIA and the Pentagon during the Cold War.

But the increasing power of other computers and defence cuts in the post-Cold War era have severely eroded demand for costly supercomputers. Cray, the last independent supercomputer company, lost \$226 million last year on sales of \$676 million, 26 per cent below its 1994 sales.

Despite its financial woes, Cray still dominates the market for supercomputers, which are used for specialised tasks like meteorological modelling, oil exploration and flight simulations. Its custom-

ers include the US defence department's Advanced Research Projects Agency, Mobil Oil and the French Atomic Energy Commission. Moreover, Cray has a backlog of orders worth a record \$487 million.

In acquiring Cray Research in a cash and share offer, Silicon Graphics would become the leading player in the supercomputer market. It already leads the market for computers costing \$1 million to \$2 million.

The company has carved out a niche for workstation computers used by Hollywood animators, engineers and scientists, who rely heavily on visual computing.

The acquisition would allow Silicon Graphics to tap Cray's huge technical capabilities.

In other developments in the computer world, Oracle, a software company, unveiled its \$500 computer that would plug into the Internet, receiving its software from the global computer system and bypass the operating systems supplied by Microsoft. Oracle believes its cheap instruments will revolutionise the personal computer business.

Exchange hit as small players urge trading reforms delay

Sarah Ryle

THE London Stock Exchange yesterday suffered a further blow to its proposed trading reforms when smaller players — who are supposed to benefit most from them — urged that they be postponed for a year, until mid-1997.

The call came from the Association of Private Client Investment Managers and Stockbrokers (APCIMS), which represents 107 exchange member firms and other market players such as Mercury Asset Management.

Its chairman, John Cobb, told the Commons Treasury select committee investigating the exchange's future that plans to switch from a quote-driven market to an order-driven market were being run to an "overly tight" timetable.

Under the proposals, the market would move towards

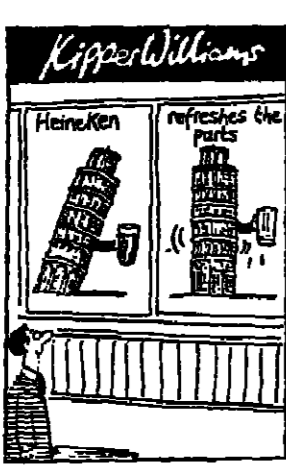
order-driven trading — whereby investors' buy and sell orders are placed on a central electronic system and automatically enacted when they are matched.

The current quote-driven Seag system enables market-makers to quote buy and sell prices on a stock exchange screen but carry out deals by telephone. This means big investors can often get better bargains than quoted screen prices while private client stockbrokers mostly pay the full screen price.

But Mr Cobb told MPs that proposals set out last month could disadvantage his members whose business represents up to 70 per cent of the daily trades on the exchange.

He said: "Mid-1997 would be the earliest date to give us breathing space, after other transitions on the market such as Crest [the electronic share-settlement service]."

Heineken snaps up Italian brewer



From John Glover in Milan

HEINEKEN yesterday reached the parts its Belgian rival, Interbrew, brewer of Stella Artois, didn't want, when it announced it had bought Italy's Birra Moretti. The cost of the transaction was reported to be \$150 million (£97 million-£114 million).

Birra Moretti, based in Udine, is the country's third-largest brewer, with a 10 per cent share of the market. Thanks to the purchase, which brings its market share to over 37 per

cent, Heineken has vaulted to first place. Heineken's biggest Italian rival is Birra Peroni Industriale.

With brands such as Peroni, Nastro Azzurro and Wührer, BPI has around 30 per cent of the market. Imported beers have about a fifth and local operations hold the rest. Brewers complain the market is over-fragmented and regionalised. "Basically, we're strong in the south and Heineken is strong in the north," said Alessandro Papa, a BPI executive.

This is the second trip to Interbrew's bar by Heineken, which has eschewed a

direct presence in the Italian market. A year ago, Interbrew sold Heineken its Italian subsidiary. Last summer, after Interbrew bought John Labatt, the Canadian brewer, it found Moretti in its portfolio. Yesterday's sale was "the logical consequence" of that, said an industry source.

The Italian beer market is small by EU standards. Italians knock back only 26 litres of beer per head each year, the lowest in Europe. The French, who like Italians, are fond of wine, put away 39 litres per head; the British manage 100.

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مكتبة الامير

Union fury as two banks announce record returns despite undergoing dramatic transformation in recent years

Profits soar at Abbey and HSBC

Roger Cowe and Jill Papworth

BANK unions reacted angrily yesterday to the latest evidence of booming profits in the industry, as Abbey National broke the £1 billion barrier and HSBC reported record profits for any UK company.

Barclays staff are pressing for a strike ballot in anticipation of record £2 billion profits to be announced today. Barclays' own union, Unifi, revealed yesterday that 85 per cent of staff rejected the bank's pay offer, and just over half want a ballot on strike action.

HSBC, which owns Midland Bank in the UK, has beaten giants such as BT, Shell and Unilever, with pre-tax profit of £2.7 billion, an increase of 16 per cent over 1994.

The figure included almost £1 billion profit from Midland Bank, which provoked an

Britain's biggest profits

Company	Year	Profit £m
HSBC	1995	3672
BT	1994-95	3316
Shell	1995	3038
Unilever	1995	2425
BP	1994	2245
Glaxo		
Wellcome	1993-94	1955

angry response from the BIFU trade union. The assistant secretary, John Brawley, said: "Midland gets a billion, our members get pay freezes and the sack. When times were hard staff were expected to pull in their belts and buckle down. Now they're back into hefty profits, what reward do staff get? The threat of redundancy and low pay."

The union said more than 3,000 jobs would go at Midland this year, but the group chief executive, John Bond, said that continued pressure on costs at Midland would not include further major retun-

dancy programmes. He saw no need to slash the branch network further.

"We have to do what customers want and they want to be served in the communities they live in. That might mean repositioning from the high street to local shopping centres, but I believe the branch network will survive."

Mr Bond refused to reveal whether the bank had made any provision against its loans to Eurotunnel. It is thought to have an exposure of £250 million and to have earmarked up to £100 million.

The chief executive also sought to play down persistent rumours that HSBC is seeking a major takeover. He said the group wanted to boost its fund management business but had not seen any suitable candidates.

He warned that banks' margins were under fierce pressure throughout the world — a warning which helped to depress the share price despite profits higher than expected.

Abbey National's share price also helped by a dividend increase which disappointed investors. The former building society vowed to continue its aggressive growth and diversification strategy in pursuit of ultimately becoming the biggest personal financial service "supermarket" on the high street.

Following a string of acquisitions, a third of Abbey's £1,026 million profit last year came from businesses outside its traditional mortgage and savings operations.

The plan is to increase that figure to 40 per cent or more within the next two years and double the current 10 per cent contribution from the life and pensions businesses.

Further acquisitions, particularly in the life sector, are likely. Clerical Medical, currently up for sale, would be "the sort of business" Abbey National would be interested in, said its finance director, Ian Harley.

High returns belie the risks taken with new acquisitions

Outlook

Roger Cowe

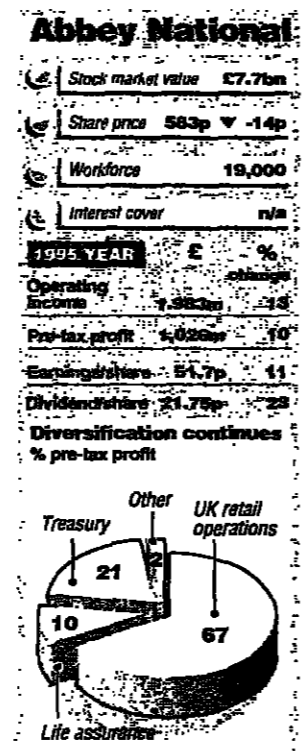
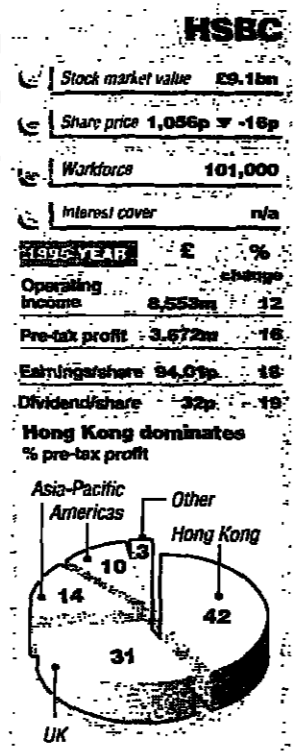
GIVE a banker a billion pounds and he will blow it on some crazy project such as Canary Wharf or loans to Bolivia. At least that was the experience of the 1970s and 1980s as banks plunged headlong into one disaster after another, ignoring the fundamental truth that high returns are usually associated with high risks.

Both HSBC and Abbey National are in danger of disproving this first law of banking, however. The substantial profit increases reported yesterday by both belie their dramatic transformation over the past few years. Both still have scope to make a mess of further strategic developments, but so far they have managed to move successfully even when they have abandoned caution.

In acquiring Midland Bank, HSBC exposed itself to horrendous possibilities. Midland had been on the sickbed for years, after its own disastrous forays into the United States and into third world lending had weakened its strong historical position in Britain and around the world.

Perhaps HSBC, like all sensible acquirers, struck when the worst of the horrors had been exposed, if not sorted out. Certainly, Midland's 10 per cent profit increase last year was in line with the results from Lloyds and NatWest, which have already reported on their 1995 performance, and not far behind what Barclays is expected to produce tomorrow.

Midland must have been worth the risk of undiscovered black holes, given HSBC's uncertain position in



Hong Kong. The UK clearing bank has added a substantial European dimension to a bank heavily weighted to Asia Pacific, but even so the chart shows that Hong Kong still provides the largest chunk of profits.

The group chief executive, John Bond, was sanguine about next year's handover of the colony to China, arguing that the key issue was growing competition from the Bank of China rather than the change in political control.

"The West sees the future of Hong Kong in political terms. But as long as we keep our pencils sharp, our customers will stay with us."

Even without the uncertainties of the colony's future,

HSBC would probably have been interested in acquiring Midland in the name of globalisation. That is the priority for big banks serving big business customers, who want a bank which can serve them wherever they go.

The marriage between West, where there are plenty of big businesses, and East, where there is plentiful growth, is almost ideal — the only drawback being that HSBC is relatively under-represented in the US. But the attraction of an Asian base explains why Standard Chartered will also report results this week, is persistently seen as a bid target.

Abbey National is in a different league, but one where

diversification and deals are equally prominent and dangerous.

The former building society showed impressive restraint when it first converted to bank status in 1988. It resolutely refused to copy the grim example of TSB in throwing money away on expensive acquisitions.

Now that seems to be changing. In the past few years Abbey has bought Scottish Mutual life assurance and the mortgage business of Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce and is planning to take over National & Provincial Building Society.

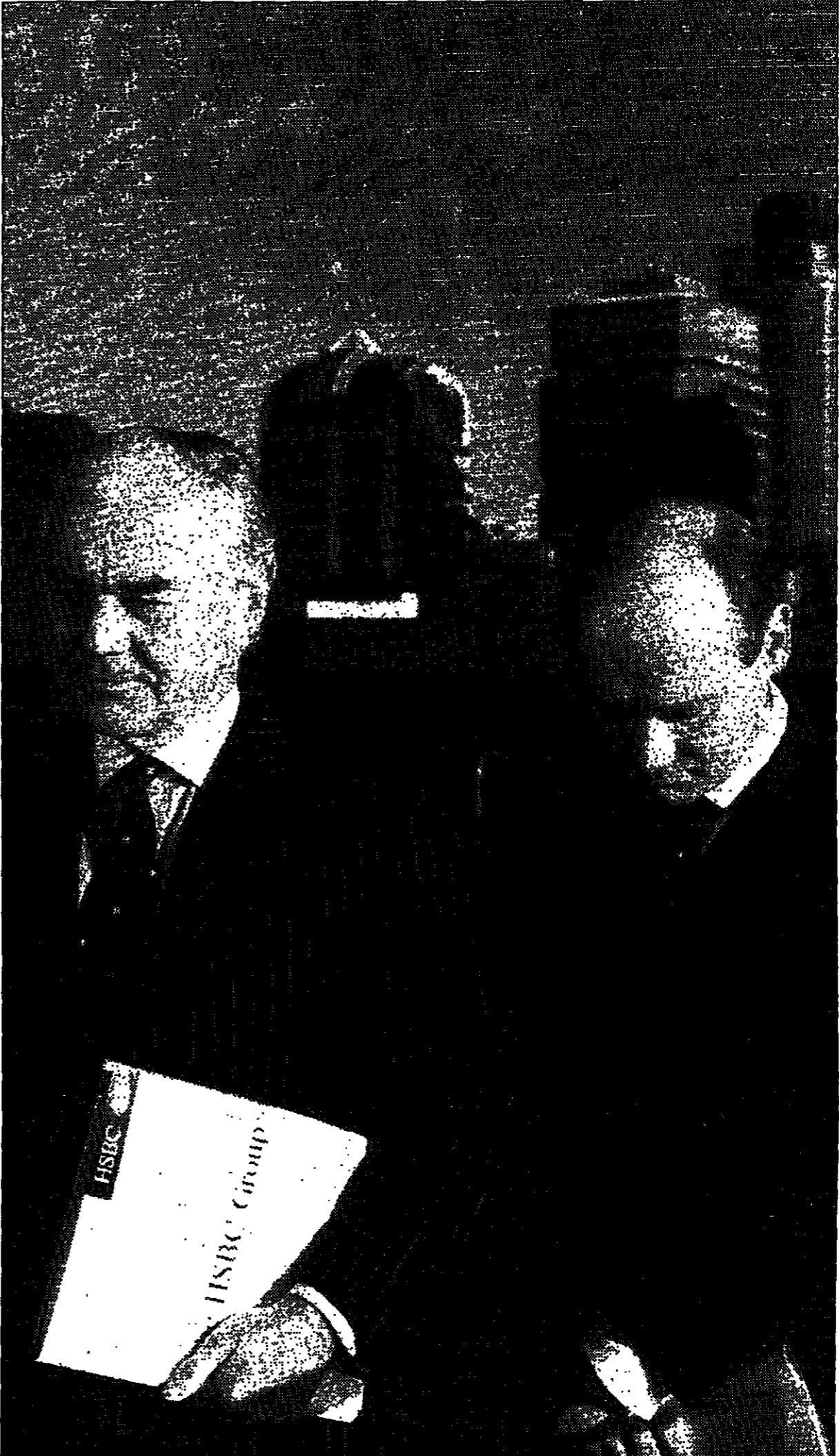
The pace of change throughout the building society industry has quickened dramatically, with the merger of the Halifax and Leeds and their impending conversion and flotation, as well as the acquisition of Cheltenham & Gloucester by Lloyds Bank.

The argument is that scale is essential to achieve the cost advantage which is the only serious weapon open to businesses selling money.

If cost is the only way to compete, then we are all — customers and staff — faced with a grim time as companies pare to the bone. But they all recognise that service is a more important competitive tool. The only problem is that bankers tend to think of service as pressing even more unwanted pensions and savings products on customers.

Perhaps Nationwide, with its apparently endless commitment to mutualism, promoted last week by rate premiums, has hit on another weapon — making customers feel good.

It has the added advantage of not giving Nationwide chiefs the opportunity to blow on crazy projects that they would have if they converted to a bank and floated on the stock market.



Triumphant returns... John Bond (left) and Douglas Flint of HSBC

BT to launch Internet service for new users

Azeem Azhar

BRITISH Telecom is to launch an easy-to-use mass market Internet service at the end of next month. BT Internet will be aimed at first-time residential and business users, and will compete with existing access providers like Demon Internet and Unipalm Pipex.

Subscription to BT Internet will cost £15 a month for unlimited use, on top of which subscribers will also have to pay local call charges while connected to the Internet. Users will be given all the software they need to send e-mail and surf the Net.

"We intend to rewrite the old Internet rule book and

create a simple and more accessible service," Rupert Gavin, BT's director of multimedia services, said.

Estimates suggest up to 300,000 Britons access the Internet from home today. A report by City firm Durlacher Multimedia has predicted this will rise nearly 20-fold by the end of the decade.

BT believes its arrival will have a big impact. "The whole market is projected to be worth £2 billion by the year 2000," Mr Gavin said. "We expect to be a major player in that marketplace."

While BT is no stranger to running Internet services — it operates SuperJANET, the UK academic network, as well as part of Europalnet, an Internet service for European

universities — its commercial services have been disappointing, by and large.

BTnet, an Internet access service for business, launched at the end of 1994, has failed to secure a significant market share and even insiders admit it has performed poorly. It has around 150 business customers who use it for full-time Internet connections. By contrast, American-owned Unipalm Pipex has around 1,300 such customers, up from around 700 six months ago.

David Barrett of Unipalm Pipex, which also has 20,000 dial-up users, said BT's announcement was "a belated attempt from a phone company to jump on to the bandwagon".

Sabena chief will quit today after strikes cost troubled airline £20m

Julie Wolf in Brussels

THE head of Sabena, Belgium's national airline, is set to quit today as part of a management shake-up following a series of strikes that have cost the airline more than £20 million.

Pierre Godfroid, Sabena's chairman and chief executive, has been blamed for the troubles after he tore up union agreements.

Swissair, which last year took a 49.5 per cent stake in Sabena, has also become alarmed at the situation.

Sabena's bid is under pressure to come up with an immediate cost reduction package that can be sold to the trade unions, which have promised industrial peace only until the end of this year.

Any changes will involve a delicate balancing act, not just between the Swiss and Belgian interests in the carrier but also between Belgium's two main linguistic communities — the Flemish and French.

Mr Godfroid was able to straddle these communities because he speaks both Flemish and French languages and comes from Antwerp.

Airbus Industries was poised yesterday to win a big order for 20 of its A320s from Northwest Airlines in a deal worth over \$500 million (£324 million).

News in brief

Blue Circle cuts 450 UK and German jobs

BLUE Circle Industries axed 240 jobs in the UK and 210 in Germany yesterday, also warning that 200 more in France are to go. The cuts are part of the restructuring of its heating division, which will cost 1,300 jobs across Europe.

In the UK, the group is transferring manufacture of Potterton boilers from Warwick to Padtham, Lancashire, by the summer.

The previously announced closure of the company's Myson radiator plant in Hull, with the loss of about 110 jobs, will see all activities relocated to Gateshead by the end of the year.

The group's shares rose 9p to 960p on news that the company aims to reduce manufacturing capacity while maintaining Blue Circle Heating's current revenue base. — Tony May

Savoy serves up £11.5m profit

THE Savoy group, tipped as a takeover target following the acquisition of its majority shareholder, Forte, by the Granada group, reported yesterday a 158 per cent rise in profit to £11.5 million for 1995.

The chairman, Sir Ewen Fergusson, said the improvement stemmed from the introduction of new leadership under the managing director, Ramon Pajares, and better motivation of managers and staff. In addition, the luxury end of the hotels market was "picking up rapidly".

Shares remained unchanged at 1280p. — Lisa Buckingham

Directors carry takeover can

ALMOST two-thirds of UK corporate takeovers fail because they do not enhance shareholder value, the accountancy group Price Waterhouse said yesterday. The firm blamed directors who did not understand how to improve shareholder value.

Mike Maskell, a PW partner, said the shortcomings arose from the fact that most managers' incentive schemes were based on profits rather than shareholder value; that many companies did not know the true cost of capital; and that a large proportion of managers lacked the financial information to monitor performance. — Lisa Buckingham

Thomson's £2.2bn look West

THOMSON Corporation, former owners of Times Newspapers, announced yesterday it has agreed to acquire Minnesota-based West Publishing for \$1.43 billion (£2.23 billion) in cash. Toronto-based Thomson said it expects the acquisition not to reduce earnings in 1997, and to increase them from 1998. — Bloomberg

Domestic gas tariffs review

BRITISH Gas is to review its domestic prices following scrutiny of its tariff structure by Clare Spottiswoode, director-general of industry regulator Ofgas. BG also said it would respond to cut-price offers from competitors in the South-west where trials in a competitive market for household supply start on April 1 — by offering enhanced price-and-service packages to consumers. — Chris Barrie

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The newly signed 25-stone William Perry is going to be the World League's biggest star

Report by Mike Carlson

Fridge saves the Monarchy

THE white may shake at White Hart Lane this spring, for William "The Refrigerator" Perry is coming to the London Monarchs...



More momentum for the Moe-narks... Perry has put on weight since playing for Chicago

Monarchs than that other high-profile signing, Gavin Hastings will be the Scottish Claymores...

Ajax for the City Ground

AJAX of Amsterdam, the world and European club champions, will join Manchester United, Nottingham Forest and Chelsea...

Marathon Vincent Rousseau, second fastest in the world last year, will run the London Marathon on April 21...

Golf Jody Faganaga, Barclay Howard, Graham Rankin and Gary Wolstenholme...

Racing Martell reach agreement on logo dispute

THE row between the British Horseracing Board and certain sponsors about the exclusivity of advertising on jockeys' colours took a twist yesterday...

Port In A Storm carries bottom weight in the Gretton Bridge Handicap Chase and has a 5lb pull for a five lengths beating by Tresider at Sedgefield last time.

At Lingfield, Silktail (4.00) is napped to win the Cook Limited Stakes. This filly had useful form on the flat last season...

Catterick runners and riders

Table listing race results for Catterick, including race numbers, names, and times.

Leicester with guide to recent form

Table listing race results for Leicester, including race numbers, names, and times.

Lingfield (All-weather Flat)

Table listing race results for Lingfield, including race numbers, names, and times.

Results

Table listing race results for other tracks, including Plumpton, Southwell, and others.

Plumpton

Table listing race results for Plumpton.

Southwell

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Southwell

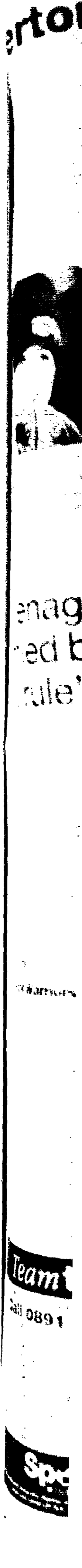
Table listing race results for Southwell.

Plumpton

Table listing race results for Plumpton.

Southwell

Table listing race results for Southwell.



Handwritten text at the bottom of the page: 'سكنا من الاصل'

Fridge turns up the heat, page 14

Martell resolve logo dispute, page 14

Anderton comeback shelved, page 15

Work permits frustrate transfers, page 15

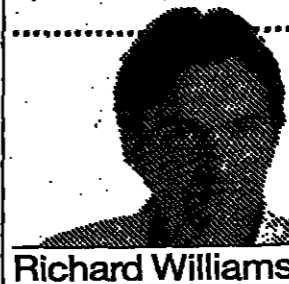
SportsGuardian

WORLD CUP CRICKET



Give it a whirl... umpire Cyril Mitchley oversees the drying operation after yesterday's deluge in Patna. However, the game between Kenya and Zimbabwe had to be abandoned

Tragic, this hellish saga of Faustino



Richard Williams

IN TERMS of natural justice Martin Bodenham was right to take no immediate action over Faustino Asprilla's use of the elbow and forehead against Keith Curle at Maine Road on Saturday. Had he seen either incident more clearly, he might have felt constrained to flourish the red card at Newcastle's Colombian forward. As the matter stood, his obstructed view protected him from doing the wrong thing.

was the degree of provocation involved. Davis, then Arsenal's captain and on the verge of a regular place in the England team, was a play-maker of refined gifts and a scarcely blemished disciplinary record; the enforced hiatus destroyed the momentum of his career.

So now we are faced with the problem of Asprilla, who arrived in England a couple of weeks ago and turned the heads of Curle and his fellow centre-backs within 10 minutes of setting foot on the pitch. We know that he has a colourful past. I should be surprised to discover, for example, that his contract with Newcastle United exempts him from Sunday matches on account of a prior commitment to take his place in the choir stalls at St Mary's Cathedral on Clayton Street. But his misbehaviour was not the catalyst of Saturday's mayhem. His talent was.

If you ask me, it went back to the minute before half-time when he broke Nigel Clough's tackle and dinked the ball diagonally forward over the heads of Curle and his fellow centre-backs. As it fell to earth, backspin made it sit up and beg to be driven home by the onrushing Philippe Albert, whose blind-side run had been spotted and assessed by the Colombian. As the target is unlikely to have encountered in Colombia, and certainly not in Serie A, where even the hard men think of themselves as creative footballers.

Illingworth stands by his man

In a side that can turn misfortune into a habit-forming drug the potential is there for the whole thing to fall apart

Mike Selvey reports much defiance and an apology

RAYMOND Illingworth, whose reluctance to acknowledge Mike Atherton as the best man to lead England characterised his early period in selectorial office, gave his captain his backing yesterday in the face of calls for a change at the helm for the remainder of the World Cup.

Meanwhile Atherton has offered his apology to the Pakistani journalist whom he labelled a "buffoon" during the press conference that followed England's defeat by South Africa. In a brief statement the captain said: "I am sorry if I caused offence to a local journalist and the local journalists during questions yesterday."

Those keen on semantics will note the "if": there was no "I" about it. But the apology has been accepted by the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists, which had sought it on behalf of the offended man, and unless the Karachi crowd retain umbrage when England play Pakistan on Sunday, there the matter would seem to rest.

Were it not for the fact that one-day cricket is a notoriously fickle beast, it would be easy to write off England as total no-hopers with the whole edifice crumbling about their ears. Even the local papers have begun to take the mickey, suggesting that England should qualify in future through the ICC Trophy, the route through

which non Test-playing countries gain entry. Now, there may be misguided people who are wondering what, if Illingworth is the supreme being of English cricket, is occurring here. It is not unknown for him to use his powers unilaterally, so why the problem with the opener? If he felt Atherton and Stewart should have faced the new ball, then his responsibility was to insist that it happened.

On the other hand, setting fields for the slog in the opening overs when there are restrictions on the number of outfielders is not easy. But Palfreman was allowed the freedom to hit the ball over the leg-side infield to wide open spaces at midwicket while a man was stationed, to no great effect, at deep square leg. Atherton had acknowledged that something different was required but had neither the nous nor the flair to do something marginally unorthodox.

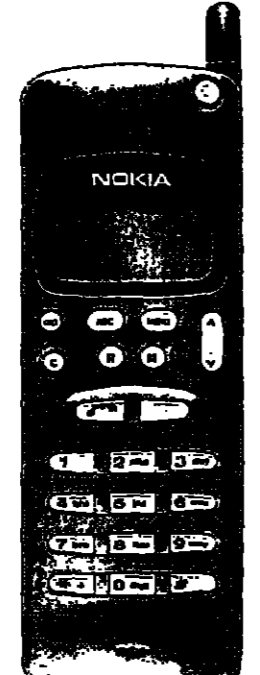
Short of Illingworth and Atherton using a radio link, as in American football, the captain is on his own on the field. But surely he and the chairman, who prides himself on being a master tactician, would have discussed the possibilities and arrived at some contingencies?

Atherton's captaincy remains fundamental to the future progress of the England Test team, and he is a genuinely classy opening batsman in limited-overs cricket. But there is a real case for wondering whether his approach is sufficiently upbeat to take short games by the scruff and twist situations.

Convention is the problem, however. It has always been assumed that a captain should be captain come what may. Yet since one-day international cricket now has a character far removed from Test cricket, selectors must acknowledge that, provided he can cut the mustard as a player, a specialist captain is as much a part of the game as a specialist batsman.

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FA charges Asprilla and Curle but police rule out prosecution

Ian Ross

FAUSTINO ASPRILLA and Keith Curle were charged with misconduct over Saturday's ugly incidents at Maine Road.

The Colombian striker, who cost Newcastle United £7.5 million this month, has been charged on two counts and the Manchester City captain on one after a speedy Football Association investigation into the widely reported flare-ups during the stormy 3-3 Premiership draw.

Both men now have 14 days to respond. They face possible suspension and heavy fines.

The FA's action came after senior officials, including the chief executive Graham Kelly, spent hours studying video footage of the two incidents. The comments of the match referee Martin Bodenham and his linesman Andrew Martin were faxed to Lancaster Gate early yesterday.

"It is clear that both players have a case to answer," said an FA statement.

Asprilla appeared to elbow Curle in the face as they disputed possession early in the second half, and just after the final whistle he seemed to head-butt the defender.

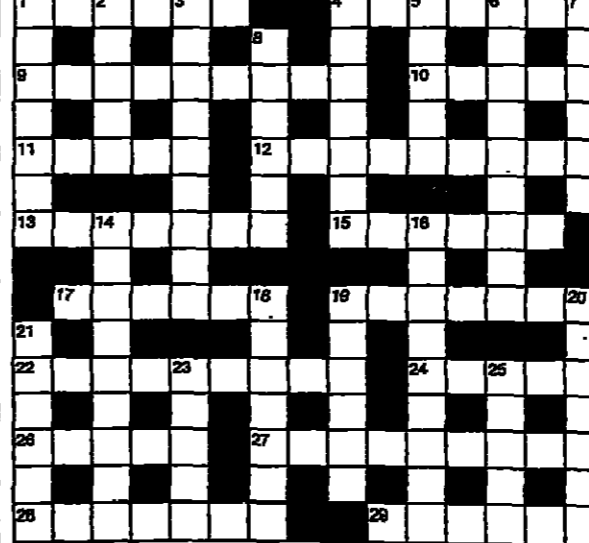
The Newcastle manager Kevin Keegan, who had said he would discipline Asprilla if he was "satisfied [the Colombian] was in the wrong", ordered the media to stay away from United's training centre yesterday as St James' Park resounded not to the sound of condemnation but to rapidly closing ranks.

There are many who fear a hard-sell, get-rich mentality more suitable for fast food than for last rites.

G2 page 4

Guardian Crossword No 20,586

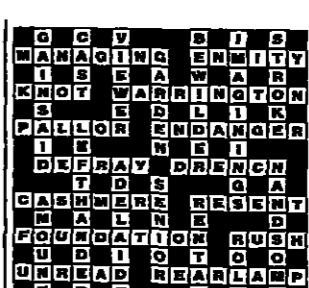
Set by Plodge



- Across**
- 1 No Parfait Knight pulls up, stopping short... (9)
 - 4 ... on the road. But there's no harm in going back to make his fortune (7)
 - 9 Take in smoother tawny port in 11 (9)
 - 10 Almost regain consciousness on the plane (5)
 - 11 Outside France, the Parisian suffer from lack of air (5)
 - 12 About a father of Midnight's Children sending Bill back to University in 11 (9)
 - 13 Support North List as a federation (7)
 - 15 One of 11's crops is supported on ten poles (6)
 - 17 He wrote of 11's struggle - "Golden Spring" (9)
 - 19 11's attic painter (2,5)
 - 22 The Free-Church minister who became 11's dramatist (6)

- 24 A house not long finished, in the province of 11 (5)
- 26 Having contained the disease, diagnosis was made less difficult (5)
- 27 Letting in article of 11 and becoming more lenient (9)
- 28 The Italian smart-set blows into the Mediterranean... (7)
- 29 ... having sailed with exemplary guides (6)

- Down**
- 1 Simple Simon sits down for seconds (7)
 - 2 11's city where the artist embraced a seedy local girl (5)
 - 3 Simple commons said to have been forked out for the fight (5,4)
 - 4 The spirit returned to Tory M.P. who gave up wine for 11's painter (7)
 - 6 Pass back with hesitation to the stand-in (5)



CROSSWORD SOLUTION 20,585

- 6 16 quality of one's island in the French church (6)
- 7 Has Ruyian's Detroit seen the best of Vincent Hanna? (6)
- 8 Inverior who showed a lack of constancy in retirement (6)
- 14 Strikes dumb those pusses whose purr is not up to scratch (9)
- 16 Inherent in reading trash (6)
- 18 Subsequently almost all will produce a side shoot (7)
- 19 Stands for 4 down and 19 ac. when 29 lost a penny to gain pounds (6)
- 20 Another of 11's crops grown in the Great Plain (7)
- 21 It's a hook, to push off around the Orient... (6)
- 22 ... and not have to dread the summer (5)
- 28 One British isle, first and last, rendered to 11 (5)

Solution tomorrow

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